

THE
ARGUMENT FROM PROPHECY.

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PREFACE.

IN the following pages the Christian Reader may perhaps miss some of the considerations which he has been accustomed to associate with the Argument from Prophecy, as contributing to its strength and completeness. The thought may also occur to him that a view of Hebrew Prophecy has been acquiesced in or accepted, which attributes to it too little of distinct and definite prediction.

At the outset, therefore, I hope he will allow me to remind him that not every consideration or particular application which is forcible and interesting to the Believer is available to impress the Sceptic, against whom the Argument is maintained; and that the tendency

of modern critical research has been in the direction of reducing the proportion of the definitely predictive element, and raising doubts about the evidence of it generally, so as to make it less fitted than formerly to bear the weight of the Argument.

NOTE TO THE SECOND EDITION.

A FEW corrections have been made in this Edition for the sake of clearness, of which the chief will be found in the last Section, in the notice of the argument founded on the predictions of the Dispersion. In other respects the book is unaltered.

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THE ARGUMENT FROM PROPHECY.

SECTION I.

PRELIMINARY REMARKS—OBJECT AND NATURE
OF THE ARGUMENT—THE ARGUMENT SUB-
SIDIARY, CUMULATIVE, PRESUPPOSES THEISM.

THE aim of the following pages is to exhibit, in a compact and popular form, the argument for the supernatural origin and divine authority of Christianity, which may be derived from the prophetic element in the Scriptures of the Old Testament. I wish to clear the argument from such superfluous adjuncts as cloud rather than illuminate its progress, or waste its strength in needless digressions and generalities ; and also from such considerations as the advance of critical research has shown to be untenable, or of doubtful validity, or not properly available for proof against the sceptic. To enter into philological discussions, to pursue critical inquiries, to exhibit learning whether

original or borrowed from the accumulated stores of scholarly divines, are objects entirely foreign to my purpose. My argument will be founded on the broad, plain outlines of the Bible, and is intended for the general reader to whom critical subtleties and learned disquisitions are distasteful, and perhaps even scarcely intelligible. It is my conviction that everything which is perplexing and repulsive in elaborate scientific criticism may be kept out of sight, and the argument be drawn out in a simple and popular manner, without losing its impressiveness or being shorn of its strength.

Before entering on the main subject, there are several preliminary matters which it will be useful to consider, in order to clear the way and obtain a distinct idea of the purpose in hand.

What is it that we wish to prove? Christianity is a great fact; the greatest fact of the modern world: the noblest and most fruitful system of belief and conduct, which has ever arisen in the domain of human thought and action. But whence came it, and what gives to it its energy and grandeur? Was it a natural growth of the human mind, deriving all its character and force from the enlightened and advancing reason of the most cultivated portion

of mankind? Or had it a supernatural origin, and does it contain a revelation from God, in virtue of which it presents itself to us clothed with a divine authority and sacredness? To sustain the latter view is the object of the argument from prophecy. We wish to show that, in the ages which preceded the rise of Christianity, there was such a preparation made for it by prophetic intimations and foreshadowings of its character and story, as to set on it the seal of divine origination, and stamp it with the mark of the supernatural and heavenly.

Now about this particular argument for the divineness of Christianity there are three things needful to be borne in mind, in order to avoid mistakes about its nature and force.

The first is, that the argument is strictly subsidiary and subordinate.

There was a time when the whole edifice of Christianity was supposed to rest mainly on two great pillars, Miracles and Prophecy, which in fact were reducible to one, prophecy being but a special kind of miracle.¹ These were sup-

¹ Waterland's position, for instance, is thus described by Mr. Leslie Stephen: "We must believe in God, but we must believe in Him for the right reason. . . . The historical basis was the sole and sufficient basis, and all that men could do was to receive with due reverence whatever was

posed to be the only satisfactory means of authenticating it as something more than the product of human reason and imagination, and proving that it had its origin in the direct intervention of God. That was a view which grew up naturally in an age when the prevalent bent of men's minds inclined them to lay more stress on external evidences addressed to the logical understanding, than on those internal evidences of divine righteousness, wisdom, and grace which speak directly to the spiritual faculty. But it had two disadvantages. By directing attention chiefly to the external credentials of revelation, it invested Christianity with somewhat of a cold, mechanical, rationalistic aspect; and by resting the main defence of revelation on miracles, it laid Christianity peculiarly open to be discredited, when it became the prevalent fashion to scoff at the miraculous as incapable

confirmed by miracles." *English Thought*, vol. i. p. 258. So Pascal says, "La plus grande des preuves de Jésus Christ ce sont les prophéties."—*Pensées*, Partie II. art. xi. 1. With reference to this exaggeration of the evidential force of miracles Dean Milman says: "I do not see without apprehension the whole truth and authority of Christianity rested, as even now it is, by some very able writers, on what may be called 'the argument from miracles.' Men believe in miracles because they are religious; I doubt their becoming religious through the belief in miracles."—*Hist. of Jews*, Pref. to last Ed.

of proof and practically incredible, if not logically impossible. The recoil that followed seems to have led many to an opposite extreme, in which the external evidences are too slightly estimated, and the miraculous is kept as much as possible in the background, and treated as something which is of the nature of an incumbrance and a difficulty. Not satisfied with recognizing a mutual dependence on each other of the internal substance of the revelation, and the external miraculous attestation to its truth, the miracles proving the doctrines, and the doctrines approving the miracles; or even with laying the greater stress on the internal evidence, and suggesting that it is rather for Christ's sake that we believe the miracles than Christ for the miracles' sake;² the mind which is impatient of the miraculous, and recoils from it with an instinctive repugnance, and yet cannot surrender the blessedness of faith in Christ, gives expression to its struggle in the

² See Archbp. Trench, *Miracles*, p. 95. Also Pascal, *Pensées*, Partie II. Art. xvi. 1: "Il faut juger de la doctrine par les miracles; il faut juger des miracles par la doctrine. La doctrine discerne les miracles, et les miracles discernent la doctrine." I may add the following remark from Bishop Alexander's recent *Bampton Lectures on the Psalms*, p. 34: "They (the first witnesses) did not so much believe in Christ because they believed the miracle; they rather believed in the miracle because they believed Him."

sentiment that we believe in spite of the miracles rather than because of the miracles; as if the miracles were an obstacle to be got over, with a painful effort, instead of being signs of God's working, and helps to man's faith.

The just view, I would urge, lies between these extremes. To the thoughtful mind, *endowed with spiritual sensibility, quick to hear and respond to the voice of God, and "instructed unto the kingdom of heaven,"³ the central proof of the divineness of Christianity must ever be found in Christianity itself. The religion which is summed up in, or clusters round, the adorable and matchless Person and character of Jesus Christ; which combines all the highest elements of moral and spiritual beauty, and meets the deepest needs of the struggling, suffering human soul; wears its own witness on its front, and carries conviction with it to the earnest seeker after truth. "Every one that is of the truth," said Christ, "heareth My voice."⁴ But the coming of such a religion into the world, such a manifestation of the mercy and love of God, and of the way of reconciliation to Him, was, we may well suppose, scarcely likely to be unattended by any signs to attract attention, or external testimonies

³ Matt. xiii. 52.

⁴ John xviii. 37.

to assist belief. One would naturally look for preparation to be made for it beforehand, whereby men's hearts should be set on watching for its advent, and brought into a readiness to understand and welcome it; and as naturally we should expect its presence to be signalized by a disturbance of the familiar course and current of human life, an environment of illustrative wonders, an outbreak of divine power and grace even in the visible domain of nature. To show that these probable anticipations were realized, the former in ancient Hebrew prophecy, the latter in the miracles of the Gospels, thus becomes an important, though subordinate, part of the argument for Christianity. Prophecy and miracles, if established on a firm foundation, will be seen to have sustained their appropriate functions in the setting up of the kingdom of heaven among mankind; and they will take their rightful places in the scheme of Christian evidence, as weighty yet subsidiary witnesses for Christianity, the one pointing to and preparing for, the other illustrating and rendering conspicuous, the shining forth of "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."⁵

⁵ 2 Cor. iv. 6. "It is not the accomplishment of one portion of prophecy, nor of the entire series of it, which consti-

The second feature of the argument which claims notice is its cumulative character.

Its form is that of an induction from a very large number of particulars, and its cogency is derived from their combination. Hundreds of aspirations, promises, predictions, emblems, types, mysterious narratives and personages, go to make it up; and its peculiarity lies in this,—that each of these particulars, if separated from the rest and cross-examined by itself in a hostile spirit, is more or less disputable and open to cavil, and may leave little or no impression on the mind; and yet the whole viewed in connexion, and combined under the guidance of a leading idea or general scheme, carries with it a force which it is very hard to resist.⁶

tutes the proof of our religion.”—Davison, *Discourses on Prophecy*, viii. “The proof of the Gospel is in every-day facts, in their own inward experience, in the wants of mankind, in the nobler instincts and convictions of the human race, in the order of nature and the harmony of society. These things do not produce the Gospel, which has come from God, and is the heritage of Christendom; but they are the facts by which, when it is doubted, it is practically and necessarily tried.”—Rev. Ll. Davies, *Signs of the Kingdom*, p. 43.

⁶ “Though the evidence be but small from the completion of any one prophecy, taken separately, the amount of the whole evidence, resulting from a great number of prophecies, all relative to the same design, may be considerable; like many scattered rays, which, though each be weak in itself,

If the reader should hesitate to admit, that a strong case can possibly be constructed out of the concurrence of many particulars, each of which by itself seems uncertain or trivial, let him recall to mind those chains of minute circumstantial evidence, which often fix guilt irresistibly on persons accused of crime. Or let him remember the certainty with which a practised eye will detect a trail, every separate mark of which, when examined by itself, appears vague, indefinite, and possibly accidental. In the former case, it is the fitting together of the various petty circumstances in a continuous course of action that imparts such strength to the chain; in the latter, it is the constant recurrence of the imperfect marks in a definite track which demonstrates them to be no casual, unmeaning indentations of the soil, but the prints of real footsteps, whether of man or beast.

But as this is a point of much importance to the proper appreciation of our argument, I beg the reader's indulgence while I endeavour to make it clear by the use of a homely illustration.

I land, suppose, on the shore of a newly-dis-

yet concentered into one point shall form a strong light, and strike the sense very powerfully."—Bishop Hurd, *Second Sermon on Prophecy*.

covered island, at a sheltered spot forming a natural harbour or bay, and find a number of workmen excavating, embanking, and building close to the water's edge, with the purpose apparently of constructing a quay or landing-place. On my asking them what they are about, they tell me that they are obeying orders, but do not know the exact object of their labours. Wandering into the interior as the fancy takes me, I come upon a second party, hewing a narrow clearing through a belt of forest, and receive from them a similar answer. Still continuing my exploration I light in one place on some diggers, excavating a passage through a precipitous face of rock that bars my path; in another I observe labourers filling in a bank across a ravine; in yet another a gang of masons beginning to throw a bridge over a rapid stream. In every case I am puzzled to account for these scattered and apparently unconnected works of industrious toil. From the workmen I can obtain no explanation; and each work seems to be isolated and aimless, to originate in no sufficient cause, and contribute to no desirable result. Discerning at last a lofty eminence from which an extensive prospect may be gained, I ascend and look around. In the centre of a distant plain my eye is caught by all the signs of construc-

tive activity ; streets are being laid out, houses are rising, a city is springing into existence. And then, traversing with my glance the whole line, from this rising metropolis back to the bay where I had landed, I am struck with surprise at discovering, that every one of the works which had perplexed me lies exactly and precisely in that line. Of course the mystery is at once solved. The various parties, each working at its appointed task by itself, are really carrying out the design of a directing engineer, and making a high road from the port to the future capital. What the separate, scattered portions of the work could not suggest to me, I learn with instant and absolute certainty from seeing them in combination with each other, and in connexion with the end to which they lead up ; and so far from a shadow of doubt remaining on my mind, I am only inclined to wonder at myself for not having sooner divined the solution.

Now it may be said to be by a similar combination of many particulars, which separately are doubtful and perplexing, that the argument from prophecy gathers shape and conclusiveness. If without any clue to guide us we wander over the field of the Old Testament Scriptures, examining them here and there at random, it is very likely that we shall meet with

much that is dark and unintelligible. We may come across personages, of whom things are said that appear inapplicable and preposterous; institutions that strike our minds as strange and inexplicable; predictions that contain inconsistent and contradictory elements; aspirations that strain after the impracticable; hopes that are too glowing for the murky atmosphere of this world. Many a passage may prompt the perplexing question, "Of whom speaketh the prophet this?"⁷ many a promise may seem to wrap up its scope in midnight obscurity. A certain unrest in the present, a vague striving and pointing onwards to the future, will probably be apparent to us; but where or how the want is to find its satisfaction, or what the end shall be which may possibly crown the progress, will be a baffling and insoluble problem. In a word we should probably feel as if we were wandering in a labyrinth without a clue to its tortuous windings, or puzzling over an enigma of which the key was not in our possession. Well, in such a case, might the cry go up from our lips for some revealer, "to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof."⁸

It is Christianity that pours back light on the dark sayings of the older dispensation, and

⁷ Acts viii. 34.

⁸ Rev. v. 2.

fits its parts together in an harmonious scheme. When at the close of the long vista of Judaism, with its eventful story, unique institutions, and burning, prophetic strains, we see rising in unearthly light and beauty the Kingdom of heaven, destined to spread through the nations and fill the world ; when warrior and saint and prophet and king of the older days at last give place to the perfect ideal, even Jesus the Christ of God, of whom each has been in some measure a faint shadow or blurred, prelusive image ; then the key of the enigma, the clue of the labyrinth, is in our hands, and the ancient Scriptures become luminous to our eyes. Gazing first on the consummation of prophecy in Christ the Lord, and then turning back a comprehensive glance over the sacred Past, we see the fragments that perplexed us fit together into a divine scheme ; and discern how by types and emblems, by prophecies and promises, by deliverances and judgments, by institutions and laws, the way of the Anointed King was prepared of old. "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."⁹

There is one more feature of the argument to be noticed in these preliminary remarks ; namely, its need of a theistic basis on which to rest.

⁹ Rev. xix. 10.

Every debate requires some common ground on which the disputants agree to stand ; and in the case before us that common ground can be nothing less than the belief in a God who cares for mankind, and guides the course of the world.

This will plainly appear, if we remember that in building up by argument the doctrinal edifice of the Christian faith a certain logical order and progress is indispensable. First comes the existence of a divine Author of the universe ; out of that grows the idea of a natural or ordinary system of providence, a general rule and superintendence of the world's affairs by means of natural laws and second causes. Not till these elementary articles of the faith are established, can we advance with any assurance to consider special or direct interventions of God, in revelation and miracle and prophecy, in the growth of Judaism and the rise of Christianity. An inversion of the order would throw the whole process into confusion. To endeavour to draw out a proof of special or supernatural instances of the divine agency, before a basis was laid for them in those which are natural and ordinary, would be like attempting to build a house without a foundation, to balance a pyramid on its apex, or to hang a heavy globe on the yielding air. Were

we to invite an atheist to recognize in some wonderful occurrence the convincing sign of a supernatural or divine agency, his inevitable reply would be, that the phenomenon to which we asked his attention might possibly be very uncommon, and even inexplicable in the present state of our science, but that he knew nothing of any supernatural order or power to which it could be referred. We must, in fact, believe in God, before we are in a position to argue, that any unusual phenomenon is really miraculous; that is, that it belongs to the order of His special and direct operation, rather than to the order of the natural world. Apart from theism, the evidence which establishes the truth of some unaccountable event points to nothing more than the existence of some previously unknown law of nature, and cannot compel the mind to look above nature for a divine Agent. Testimony indeed, or our own experience, might satisfactorily assure us that something had really happened, of which we were unable on any known principles to assign the cause; such, for instance, as a true prediction, or the cure of disease by a word or touch, or the restoration of a dead body to life. But so long as we had no prior reason to believe in the existence of a God, it would always be

easier to suppose the action of some hitherto undetected natural law or force, than to invent a God to account for the strange occurrence. I repeat, therefore, that it is impracticable to demonstrate to the atheist the real miraculousness of any event, however wonderful and unaccountable it may be. A miracle presupposes a God, as one element in the very idea of it; and without starting from a theistic basis, the miraculous is practically incapable of proof.

Hence with the absolute atheist, or with the sceptic who while confessing the bare existence of an unknowable God denies the divine providence altogether, the argument from prophecy cannot be maintained to any good purpose. If neither in the manifold wonders of the physical universe, nor in the spiritual constitution and religious history of mankind, nor in the voice of his own conscience and the emotions of his own heart, a man can discern any traces of God; to undertake to convince him of the divine presence and agency in the world, by means of correspondences between ancient predictions and subsequent events, would be the vainest of enterprises; one might as reasonably expect him to be sensible of the feeble glimmer of a star, when he

is stone-blind to the blaze of the noon-day sun.¹

It is theists alone, therefore, whom I have any hope of impressing by the argument which I shall endeavour to draw out and exhibit in these pages. They confess that there is something more than blind force at work in this world of ours. They believe in a divine purpose embracing the families of mankind, and in a divine wisdom and goodness directing the evolution of their destinies. This belief, by infusing into history a spiritual meaning and unity, establishes that real and divinely-ordered connexion between its successive stages, in which alone the argument from prophecy can firmly root itself.

These three things, therefore, the reader will do well to bear in mind, concerning the argument to which his attention is invited.

First, that it occupies a subordinate place in the scheme of Christian evidence, and is subsidiary to the great central proof which Christianity itself furnishes of its own divineness.

¹ "If we do not find God within ourselves, the whole fabric of the visible universe may whisper to us of Him, but the whisper will be unintelligible."—Tulloch, *Rational Theology*, ii. 191.

Secondly, that it is a cumulative argument, of which the strength is not to be found in the separate particulars of which it is composed, so much as in their combination and concurrence.

Thirdly, that it presupposes theism, and requires a belief in the divine providence for its support.²

² As the need of a theistic basis for the proof of miracles is a point of primary importance in the controversy, but seems to have been often overlooked, especially in the construction of refutations of Hume's celebrated argument, I subjoin the following extracts from well-known writers in support of it:—

"If we do not already believe in supernatural agencies, no miracle can prove to us their existence. The miracle itself, considered merely as an extraordinary fact, may be satisfactorily certified by our senses or by testimony, but nothing can ever prove that it is a miracle; there is still another possible hypothesis, that of its being the result of some unknown natural cause; and this possibility cannot be so completely shut out as to leave no alternative but that of admitting the existence and intervention of a being superior to nature."—Mill's *Logic*, ii. p. 168.

"The effect we ascribe simply to the volition of the Deity, of whose existence and power, not to say of whose presence and agency, we have previous and independent proof In a word, once believe that there is a God, and miracles are not incredible."—Paley, *Evidences*, Introd.

"The great truth upon which the evidence of all lesser instances of supernatural power depends is the truth of the supernatural origin of this world—that this world is caused by the will of a Personal Being; that it is sustained by that will, and that therefore there is a God who is the object of prayer and worship."—Mozley, *On Miracles*, Lect. V.

"The peculiarity of the argument of miracles is that it be-

gins and ends with an assumption ; I mean an assumption relatively to that argument. We assume the existence of a Personal Deity prior to the proof of miracles in the religious sense . . . The question of miracles is thus shut up within the enclosure of one assumption ; viz. that of the existence of a God.”—*Ib.* Lect. IV. “Unless a man brings the belief in God to a miracle, he does not get it from the miracle.”—*Ib.* Lect. V.

“The Christian argument for miracles takes for granted two elementary truths—the Omnipotence and Personality of God.”—Prof. W. Lee (of Dublin), *Essay on Miracles*.

“The miracle of miracles must be the existence of a Living God. If we do not believe this, it is impossible that any smaller miracles should prove it to us.”—Rev. Ll. Davies, *Signs of the Kingdom of Heaven*, p. 35.

“For physical students as such, and for those who take their impressions of the universe solely from them, miracles can have no real existence.”—Wescott, *Gospel of the Resurrection*, p. 45.

SECTION II.

SCEPTICAL OBJECTIONS TO THE PRINCIPLE AND APPLICATION OF THE ARGUMENT CONSIDERED —CONDITIONS TO BE OBSERVED.

THE nature, and place among Christian evidences, of the argument from prophecy having been briefly indicated in the preceding section, we are ready to enter on the task of gathering together the various particulars of which it is composed, and drawing out of them the conclusion to which they point. But I beg the reader to allow me to interpose some additional considerations, before we settle down together to our work.

The argument which we are about to examine has been before the world for eighteen centuries. By the New Testament writers it is repeatedly used, both in a general and a fragmentary or allusive way. About the middle of the second century Justin Martyr urged it at great length, in his Dialogue against Trypho the Jew. With Christian apologists

it has ever since been a standing part of their defence of Christianity. The English Deists of the last century made a powerful attack on its validity, which called forth numerous replies of various degrees of merit. Since the rise of the modern critical school the dispute over it has been incessantly renewed, with all the weapons that can be drawn from the accumulated resources of philological and historical erudition.¹ One result of this long discussion and conflict has been to clear the argument from

¹ Those who wish to see all that can be urged in support of the naturalistic view of Hebrew prophecy will find it in the two learned works of Dr. A. Kuenen, Prof. of Theology in the University of Leyden, *The Religion of Israel*, and *Prophecy and Prophecy in Israel*, both of which have been translated into English. The following extract from the former will show the stand-point from which he views the rise and growth of Judaism:—"It is only by comparison that we can determine whether many persons are right in assuming a specific difference between Israel's religion and its sisters. Without a shadow of doubt, then, we deny the existence of such a difference. . . . The belief in the exceptional origin of the religion of the Israelites is founded simply and solely on the testimony of their holy records. But that appearance vanishes as soon as we look at it more closely. . . . Although, considered as a whole, the Old Testament may with justice be adduced as testifying in favour of supernaturalism; its separate parts, regarded by the light of criticism, speak loudly for a natural development both of the Israelitish religion itself, and of the belief in its heavenly origin. As soon as the dispute between the whole and its parts is noticed, it is decided."—*Religion of Israel*, vol. i. pp. 10, 11.

misleading issues, to lay bare its weaker points, and elucidate the conditions under which alone it can be fairly maintained.

In restating the argument in these pages, I shall endeavour to profit by the lessons of the past. But besides bearing them in mind for my own guidance, I think it will be for the advantage of the reader to point out beforehand the difficulties which modern critics, of the naturalistic or organic school of religious thought, find in the argument, and on the strength of which they deny its cogency.

As I have already said, the objectors to whom the argument is addressed are theists; indeed, many of them do not disdain the name of Christian in their peculiar sense, as holding Christianity to be, on the whole, the best among the natural, earth-born religions of the world. They believe in an Order of nature, in which God rules all things according to fixed, invariable laws, upholding the physical universe by His power, and energizing by His Spirit in the moral and spiritual development of His reasonable creatures. But beyond this they are unable to advance. They cannot bring themselves to believe in an Order above nature, to which miracles and special revelations, if there be such things, must of necessity belong.

To this latter Order, Christianity, if it be as we contend a divine and authoritative religion, must of course be assigned. In our sense it originated outside and above the sphere of nature, and beyond the range of the providence which insensibly sustains and governs the world's course. It was distinctly miraculous. It claimed to be founded on direct revelations from above. It is a religion of faith in an historical Person, who demands unlimited submission, trust, and devotion towards Himself, as being the human manifestation of the invisible God, and the rightful Lord of the consciences of mankind. In a word, the Christianity of the Bible and of the Church is supernatural; and to our opponents in this argument the supernatural appears to be unproved and inadmissible.

This is their position, and when among other arguments we urge upon them that which is derived from ancient Hebrew prophecy, they meet us with a twofold answer. They demur to its principle, and they question its application.

The first part of their objection may be stated in this way.

“Certain predictions, you say, were made and put on record in ancient days by

the result would be, that your entire argument would fall to the ground."

Now, if we were dealing with nothing more than a few isolated predictions, this preliminary objection would, I think, possess considerable force. Undoubtedly it would be in no slight degree irrational and hazardous to act on the principle, that a single instance of successful prediction, of whatever kind, and under whatever circumstances it might occur, is a sufficient warrant of divine inspiration. The Bible itself asserts the contrary, in a very remarkable passage of the Pentateuch. "If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams; and that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death; so shalt thou put the evil away from the midst of thee."² And if a single prediction is not sufficient to carry with it a proof of inspiration, the multiplication of instances would not necessarily add the confirmation that is needed. The

² Deut. xiii. 1—3, 5.

marvel would be heightened, and the explanation rendered more difficult, but still the element of divineness would not be satisfactorily established. Just as in the case of an alleged miracle, more, far more, than the bare wonder itself is needed to turn it into a witness of divine intervention; the whole moral and spiritual environment is an essential feature of the case, and enters largely into its determination.

But suppose that instead of a single incidental prediction or two we met with a long, connected series of prophetic utterances, extending over several centuries; suppose further that these utterances formed an integral part of the teaching of a line of remarkable men, who from age to age were the witnesses for righteousness to their nation, and laboured to elevate and refine its religion; suppose also that the intimations, the foreshadowings, the prophetic hints and sketches of the future, which were bound up with their teaching, ultimately found a realization in a new and more advanced order of things, the establishment of which formed an important epoch in the development of the human race; would not this remarkable combination of circumstances of the highest import to the world constitute a

strong case to support the idea of a divine inspiration and mission? ³ Absolute demonstration in such a case is, of course, not possible; it never is possible in things of the spirit. We have to do with probabilities, with reasonable explanations, with evidences and arguments which to candid minds have a moral weight. And to such minds we may appeal with confidence to say whether any known laws of human knowledge or growth or action would be sufficient to account, even plausibly, for such a conjunction of circumstances as that which has just been sketched out. Surely to be satisfied with seeing in its prophetic element

³ "The correspondence between the doctrines of Christianity and that promised 'revelation which directly or indirectly is the key of the Old Testament, is not a verbal coincidence, but a coincidence of facts It is obvious to say that the concurrence was accidental; and if we were examining the case of a single prediction, this might be a satisfactory explanation. But the coincidences in the present case are not of a kind, or if they were they are too numerous, to admit of this supposition. It is not one fact, nor one truth, but many facts and many truths, which were signified beforehand. Neither are we speaking of facts and truths unconnected with each other, or with any pre-understood design: but of events which came to pass in regular sequence, and forming, when put together, one great systematic whole. This does not look like an effect of chance, but of a wisdom far above the kind of knowledge which human agents have ever been seen to display."—Dean Lyall's *Propædia Prophetica*, p. 133.

nothing more than a succession of fortuitous coincidences or sagacious guesses, would betray a singular blindness to the unique character and moral significance of the entire phenomenon.

But our opponents, besides demurring to the principle, question the application of the argument. They deny that there is a series of prophecies, which have been actually and definitely fulfilled in Christianity.⁴ They virtually accuse Christians, either of manufacturing the prophecies, by reading back into the Old Testament meanings that do not really belong to it; or else of inventing fulfilments, that have no historical existence.

To make out these charges, they lay down certain conditions, which must be satisfied in order to constitute a real fulfilment of an alleged prediction. The prediction, they say, must precede in time, be intelligible and definite in its terms, and foretell something which at the time of its utterance lay beyond

⁴ "The argument would have the force which is attributed to it, were the objectors able to lay their finger on a single Old Testament prediction clearly referring to Jesus Christ, *intended by the utterers of it to relate to Him*, prefiguring His character and career, and manifestly fulfilled in His appearance on earth. *This they cannot do.*"—Greg's *Creed of Christendom*, p. 85, 3rd Ed.

the ability of merely human sagacity to foresee or conjecture. On the other hand, the fulfilment must be an event historically certain, undoubtedly posterior to the prediction, and accurately corresponding to its terms; it must also be above the suspicion of having been brought about by human contrivance, for the purpose of forming a colourable accomplishment.⁵

⁵ The conditions laid down by Davison, on the orthodox side, are practically equivalent to these. "First, the *known promulgation* of the prophecy prior to the event. Secondly, the *clear and palpable fulfilment* of it. Lastly, the *nature of the event* itself, if, when the prediction of it was given, it lay *remote* from human view, and was such as could not be foreseen by any supposable *effort of reason*, or *be deduced* from *probability* or *experience*."—*Discourses on Prophecy*, viii. Mr. Meyrick, Art. *Prophet* in Smith's *Dict. of Bible*, remarks that "Davison's second condition, 'the *clear and palpable* fulfilment of the prophecy,' should be so far modified as to take into account the necessary difficulty, more or less great, in recognizing the fulfilment of a prophecy which results from the necessary vagueness and obscurity of the prophecy itself." On the other hand Bishop Alexander (of Derry), in his *Bampton Lectures on the Witness of the Psalms*, p. 11, says, "Those who believe in the divine origin of prophecy can afford to be more exacting, and to give additional stringency to the tests proposed by Mr. Davison. They may claim beyond those—(4) That the prediction, though capable of being considered separately, shall not in itself be detached and isolated, but part of a connected and systematic whole. (5) That the sufficiency of correspondence shall be enhanced by a prediction not absolutely general and

Having laid down these conditions, they proceed to apply them as tests of those fulfilments of prophecy, on which Christians are accustomed to rely as evidences of a supernatural prescience in the prophets of Israel.

"See," they say, "how indefinite and inadequate most of those predictions are! Some are so vague that it is difficult to fix on them any distinct meaning whatever; others are not distinguishable from the forecasts of ordinary human sagacity. There are not a few among them which have not the air of being predictions at all, and would never have been suspected of foretelling anything, had not later writers, to make out a case for Christianity, applied them by way of accommodation to subsequent events. In several of the most important instances critical proof is entirely wanting either of the priority of the prediction, or of the historical reality of the event which is said to have verified it. So that on the whole, after deducting everything uncertain, irrelevant, or entirely unfounded, the residue of the prophetic element, if any at all

colourless, but enriched with a certain number of particular adjuncts. (6) On the moral side,—That the prediction shall not be of a nature merely to gratify private feeling, or stimulate an otiose curiosity, but shall have some reference to an end worthy of a divine author."

be left, is far too insignificant to furnish any appreciable support to the supernatural pretensions of Christianity.”

To justify this indictment of the argument, they go on to examine in detail the predictions to which they think Christians in general attach most importance in an evidential sense; those, namely, which are said to have been fulfilled in the miraculous birth, the character and works, the death and resurrection, of the great Founder of Christianity.

“Is there one of these,” they ask, “which is a definite, unimpeachable prediction of a well-ascertained historical event, or which does not really owe its significance to an assumption of the very facts which it is employed to establish? Let any one candidly examine the prophecies, on which the writers of the New Testament themselves rely; and he will be convinced that those so-called prophecies are referred to and used, not critically or logically, but rhetorically, and in the way of ingenious application of records and phrases, which in their origin had quite another intention and force. The seed to spring from the father of Israel, numerous as the stars of heaven and the ocean-sands;⁶ the prophet to

⁶ Gal. iii. 16.

resemble Moses, announced by the Deuteronomist, apparently to support a contemporary reformation;⁷ the high priest of the ancient sacrificial ritual;¹ David and other pious psalmists, oppressed almost to death by the wicked, but ultimately rescued and restored;² a Jonah coming forth alive from a three days' entombment in the whale's belly;³ the child born of the prophetess to Isaiah as a sign to Ahaz of approaching deliverance;⁴ a mysterious servant of Jehovah, whether some individual prophet or the collective nation, despised and rejected of men, but vindicated by God;⁵ the rock of the desert yielding water at the stroke of the mystic rod;⁶ the serpent of brass lifted up for the healing of the people when dying of the fiery bite;⁷ the lamb of the passover;⁸ the burnt offerings of the temple-worship;⁹—such are the personages and things of the Old Testament which are rhetorically appealed to by the primitive advocates of Christianity, and taken as figures or emblems of its Founder. Is it not plain, that in all these cases it is not with real fulfilments of genuine prophecy that

⁷ Acts iii. 22, 23.

¹ Heb. iii. 1; v. 5.

² Matt. xxvii. 35, 41; Acts ii. 25—31; Rom. xv. 3.

³ Matt. xii. 40. ⁴ Matt. i. 22, 23. ⁵ Acts viii. 32—35.

⁶ 1 Cor. x. 4.

⁷ John iii. 14.

⁸ 1 Cor. v. 7.

⁹ Heb. ix. 14, 28.

we are presented, but only with pious and imaginative applications of the ancient Scriptures to supposed features in the story and character of Jesus of Nazareth?"¹

Under this treatment the strength of the argument may at first appear to evaporate and vanish away. But let us examine if this be in truth a fair representation of the case. I should say that the apparent victory is won, by an ingenious substitution of the narrow idea of *prediction* for the far wider one of *prophecy*.² Were the argument really to depend for its force on our discovering literally exact fulfilments of definite and precise predictions, I confess that it would appear to me exceedingly difficult to establish. But so far is that from being the case that I am convinced we might give over to the sceptic's destructive analysis all the specific predictions of particular incidents,

¹ This was the line of argument adopted by Collins in his *Grounds and Reasons*, published in 1724.

² "We take, in my judgment, a narrow view of Hebrew prophecy, if we confine and limit it to the more or less distinct anticipation of future events. . . . Hebrew prophecy was a vast vaticination, not only in special texts and, as it were, premature allusions to facts and circumstances in the evangelic history, but of the Gospel itself; a twilight, a dim twilight, of Christian righteousness; a necessary opening act in the great drama of the providential government of the world."—Dean Milman, *Sermon on Hebrew Prophecy*.

and allow that each of them by itself is more or less disputable, without surrendering any material portion of the argument. To suspend the issue on a demonstration that a certain number of clearly-expressed prophecies have been verified in as many definite events literally and exactly corresponding to them, would be to court discomfiture and refutation. There was much good sense in the remark made by a celebrated apologist for Christianity a century and a half ago:³ "They who consider the prophecies under the Old Testament as so many predictions only, independent of each other, can never form a right judgment of the argument for the truth of Christianity drawn from this topic, nor be able to satisfy themselves when they are confronted with the objections of unbelievers;" a statement which certainly has not lost, but rather gained, force and weight from the progress achieved since his days in philological and historical criticism.⁴

Doubtless it has been too common among the

³ Bp. Sherlock, *Discourses on Prophecy*, Preface.

⁴ "After all, it is not on separate passages that we depend for our proof, so much as on the manner in which the whole Bible prepares for and teaches Christ. The whole atmosphere of the Old Testament is instinct with prophecy. Judaism from first to last is a progress towards the Gospel."—Dean Payne Smith's *Bampton Lectures on Prophecy*, vi.

defenders as well as the opponents of revelation, to confound the grand prophetic spirit, which was characterized as much by its spiritual insight as by its wide outlook over the future, with a narrow prescience of specific and isolated events. Both attack and defence have been too often conducted on the supposition, that the qualification of the prophet for his office must be looked for in the faculty of foretelling particular incidents with verbal accuracy, rather than in the illumination which enabled him to grasp the great principles that shape the course of human destiny, and to divine the broad outlines of the issue in the dispensations of God.⁵

In drawing out, therefore, the argument in its several branches, I shall not take my stand on those instances of fulfilled prediction, of which the sceptic makes so little account. The dispute over them would be endless, and lead to no satisfactory result. Rather would I allow, that many of the instances most commonly brought forward, however suited to confirm and edify the believer, are not equally avail-

⁵ The once popular works of Newton and Keith, which rested the argument chiefly on supposed exact predictions of future events, have in consequence become quite inadequate to meet modern critical objections.

able to convince the gainsayer. They rest on Christianity, not Christianity on them.

Lest, however, the reader should think that I am surrendering the citadel of the argument by this concession, I would ask him to consider for a moment how the case stands, in regard to the evidential value of many of these predictions.

It is plain, that to constitute a real fulfilment there must be an undoubted historical event to correspond with the prediction. But how do we satisfy ourselves that the verifying event ever really happened? The bare assertion of an Evangelist is no sufficient proof to the sceptic, to whom the veracity of the Gospels is not a thing to be taken for granted. Corroboration from an independent source is required; and in many cases that is to be obtained in no other way, than by arguing back from the already ascertained divineness of the revelation. The Evangelists, for instance, find fulfilments of prophecy in the miraculous conception,⁶ the nativity in Bethlehem,⁷ the flight into Egypt,⁸ the slaughter of the innocents,⁹ the settling at Nazareth,¹ the miracles of healing,² the triumphal

⁶ Matt. i. 22, 23.

⁷ Matt. ii. 5, 6.

⁸ Matt. ii. 15.

⁹ Matt. ii. 17, 18.

¹ Matt. ii. 23.

² Matt. viii. 17.

entry on the ass's colt,³ the betrayal by Judas,⁴ and the price paid for his treachery,⁵ the arrest,⁶ the flight of the disciples,⁷ the parting of the garments by lot,⁸ the offer of the vinegar,⁹ the piercing of the side,¹ the preservation of the sacred limbs from fracture.² But when we are asked how we can be sure that these events, of which there is no other record, really occurred, and were not merely pious inventions suggested by the supposed predictions, it is obviously not enough to reply that they are related in the Gospels. Our proof must be more indirect and complex. We must begin by falling back on the general evidence, and insisting that the preparation made by divine providence for Christianity, the broad features of its rise and growth, and the intrinsic character of its doctrines, together furnish a reasonable proof that it was of God. And then, turning back to the narratives which were the earliest authorized embodiments and organs of its teaching, we must maintain that the proved divineness of the religion authenticates those narratives generally, and guarantees their substantial truthfulness and accuracy, in the

³ Matt. xxi. 4, 5.

⁴ John xiii. 18; Acts i. 16, 20.

⁶ Matt. xxvi. 56.

⁸ Matt. xxvii. 35.

¹ John xix. 37.

⁵ Matt. xxvii. 9, 10.

⁷ Matt. xxvi. 31.

⁹ John xix. 28.

² John xix. 36.

particulars in which they are without corroboration from independent historical sources.

Now if it is by no other than this roundabout process that the historical reality of these minor and specific fulfilments of prophecy can be established, it is manifest that we cannot rely on them in our debate with the sceptic, with whom the divine origin of Christianity is the very thing in question.³

There is one matter, however, in which I am in full accord with our opponents; namely, that in conducting this argument we must take care not to read back New Testament ideas into the Old, and then argue from them as if they were originally found there. That would be to reason in a circle, and to beg the question by relying on assumptions the proof of which is dependent on the conclusion we are endeavouring to reach. It is permitted to believers, who have already accepted the entire Bible as the record of a divine revelation, and discerned in Christ the crown and fulfilment of the pur-

³ After what has been said, it seems needless to add that the argument must be conducted without assuming the historical truth of the Gospels. If their narratives be true Christianity must be divine, and the argument from prophecy would be superfluous. It is an additional argument, resting on the correspondence between ancient prophecy and the *religion* which originated in the teaching of Jesus.

poses of God, to seek both pleasure and profit in tracing out minute coincidences and correspondences between the earlier and later revelations, and to confirm their faith by discovering allusions to, or prefigurations of, the Christ of God in an hundred mysterious personages, institutions, incidents, types, promises, and predictions, which are scattered along the track of the Hebrew sacred literature. But for the purpose of convincing the unbeliever that method of dealing with Scripture is not available. We must not ask him to look at the Old Testament with Christian eyes, nor expect him to accept the meanings which evangelists and apostles have taught us to find in it. In arguing with him we must take the ancient records simply as they appear of themselves to the critical student, and insist on nothing but that which historical research or philological analysis can sustain or render probable. The uses made of prophecy in the New Testament, or in later Christian writings, may indeed set us on looking for meanings that might otherwise have escaped our notice ; but it is only when those meanings turn out to be firmly rooted in the original documents, that they become available for our purpose.

But after putting aside every topic that is

inconsistent with this condition of all sound reasoning, there will remain, as I am persuaded and hope to show, abundant materials for constructing a real and forcible argument from prophecy, on behalf of the divine origin and authority of the Christian revelation. No criticism can get rid of the Old Testament. After sceptical ingenuity has done its utmost, in scrutinizing the origin, date, integrity, and purport of the various portions of the Old Testament Canon, the venerable Book still stands and witnesses before the world, as it has stood and witnessed for more than two thousand years. Every part of it is universally acknowledged to be prior to Christianity. Of the earliest portions the date is admitted by the most adverse critics to be not less than a thousand years before the beginning of our era; and the latest preceded the rise of Christianity by at least more than one century. It was the gradual growth of ages, within the bosom of a single small nation, whose unique history and spiritual development it mirrors and records; so that, however varied and diverse its parts may be, it is no miscellaneous collection of alien and irreconcilable documents, but an organic whole, bound together by the unity that springs out of a continuous growth and progress. And the

question to which we want a solution is this : Does this remarkable Book exhibit a real presentiment and foreshadowing of the Christianity that was born into the world after its close, of such a nature as to suggest a divine ordering and connexion, a divinely-wrought fulfilment of a divinely-inspired forecast ? If this question can be answered in the affirmative, then the argument from prophecy may be justly reckoned among the defences of Christianity.

SECTION III.

THE HISTORICAL CONNEXION BETWEEN JUDAISM AND CHRISTIANITY.

THE reader has now been detained long enough with preliminary discussions, and will perhaps be impatient to enter on the argument itself. If in consequence of what has been premised he finds himself, as I hope he will, in a better position to estimate the nature and tenour of the argument, and its place in the wide scheme of Christian evidence, the time already occupied will not have been thrown away.

What I shall endeavour to show is this ; that Hebrew prophecy was animated and pervaded by certain great presentiments and aspirations, which transcended the natural operation and foresight of the unassisted reason ; and which were afterwards realized and fulfilled in Christianity, in a way that equally transcended the powers of human nature, and indicated a divine ordering and guidance of the course of events.

Our first step must be, to establish the historical connexion of the two religions which meet at the junction of the Old Testament with the New.

Christianity undoubtedly was rooted in the soil of Judaism, and sprang, with whatever superadded elements, out of Jewish thought and culture. How Judaism was gradually formed, and attained the strength and temper to serve as the ground or cradle of the new religion, we learn from the books collected together in the Old Testament, which not only recorded the national history, but also gave expression, age after age, to whatever of religious knowledge and spiritual attainment was highest and best in the nation at their respective dates. Comparing these books, whether of history, or devotion, or moral and prophetic instruction, with the literature of the rest of the ancient world, it becomes manifest that they present to our view a development that had no parallel elsewhere. Small though the land was, a mere strip of country in a corner of the vast continent, and insignificant as the people were by the side of the mighty empires of the East and West, there sprang out of them a succession of historians, of psalmists, and of prophets, which was absolutely unique, and by the united

labours of whom was built up a system of religious thought, which, for sublimity of conception and moral elevation, immeasurably surpassed all contemporary systems. It was there alone that the one, eternal, everliving God was set forth as the Maker and Ruler of all things, the infinitely righteous and holy One, rich in mercy and bounteous in giving, the strength and salvation of His people; there alone that man was represented as the child of the heavenly Parent, formed in His image, taken into covenant with Him, and destined to find his strength and peace by humble trust and obedient righteousness. For such conceptions of God and man, and the relation between them, conceptions so lofty, so spiritual, and so fraught with moral energy and fruitfulness, we search in vain among all the other religions of antiquity.

Out of the midst of this Judaism in its maturity sprang Christianity, incorporating all its purest and noblest elements, and combining them into a universal religion, which has gathered all the foremost nations within its embrace. And just as Judaism had no parallel in the old world, so has Christianity no parallel in the new. It is unique in its spirituality, its beneficence, its power over the heart, its

expansive energy and its moral fruitfulness. True it unhappily is, that Christendom at large has not yet reached the high level of Christianity, any more than the Jewish people in general ever rose to the height of the religion set forth by their psalmists and prophets. But the ideal is not the less noble and true, because through human infirmity the actual always falls below it. The Judaism of the later psalms and prophetic writings, and the Christianity of the New Testament, are the noblest moral and spiritual growths of the old and new worlds respectively, and they form an historic sequence in organic connexion with each other.

Now to the theist these facts cannot fail to be of the highest significance. Believing that God really governs the world, and guides the course of human progress, he cannot ascribe to blind accident or unconscious fate this remarkable development and sequence, which more than any other has moulded and fashioned the destinies of mankind. He must believe God to have been in some way concerned in it, if not by special interferences and revelations, yet at least by a providential oversight and unperceived guidance. To be consistent with his theistic view of the world, he can scarcely fall short of

discerning in Judaism a preparation divinely adapted to lead on to the universal religion of Christianity. If the phrase "God in history" has any meaning at all, it cannot mean less than this. For to suppose that there should be a providential superintendence and divine guidance in the rise and fall of nations, and their advance in the arts and sciences of civilization, and not in the noblest and most influential growths of religion, seems too inconsistent and improbable to be maintained by any one. But if in the purpose of God Judaism did prepare the way for Christianity, and formed the system of moral and religious thought out of which the latter grew, it plainly follows that there must have been such a relation, such a correspondence, between them, as to invest the earlier *in some sense* with the aspect of a prophecy or prognostication, and the later with that of a fulfilment.¹ The young shoot is a prophecy of the full-grown tree; the child of the mature man;

¹ Even the celebrated rationalistic writer, De Wette, acknowledges this, in a striking passage quoted from one of his occasional papers by Bahr, and reproduced in Fairbairn's *Typology of Scripture*, p. 45: "Christianity sprang out of Judaism. . . The entire Old Testament is a great prophecy, a great type of Him who was to come and has come. . . . Christianity lay in Judaism as leaves and fruit do in the seed, though certainly it needed the divine sun to bring them forth."

the original sketch of the completed picture. In this sense, in a divinely-ordered world, such as the theist admits our world to be, Judaism gradually fashioned, and growing to maturity during more than a thousand years, must be considered as a providential preparation for, and fore-shadowing of, the Christianity that at length rose out of it, and in completing it absorbed and replaced it.

This, however, is only the primary step in the argument, a laying out of the ground on which it is to be built up. We can conceive of a natural progress of our race, under the general superintendence of God's providence, unaccompanied by any supernatural interference or special revelation. The religious instinct or sentiment of mankind might be supposed to unfold itself by its own inherent energy, and to advance by a purely natural growth from stage to stage of spiritual culture, each being in turn a stepping-stone to a higher; and it might be urged, as indeed it is urged by the naturalistic school of theology, that Judaism and Christianity are simply two of these stages of development, and that others may be expected to follow, on the same line indeed, but dropping by the way the unsound and fantastic notions of the Past, and exhibiting novel and improved ele-

ments of religious thought. In such an order of things a religion originating in revelation and possessed of divine authority would, of course, find no place.

We must therefore go on to inquire, whether the historical and organic connexion between Judaism and Christianity, in virtue of which the one must be considered as in some sort and measure a preparation for and adumbration of the other, was of such a kind as to transcend any effects which can be reasonably attributed to the unassisted religious instinct of mankind, and to imply the direct or supernatural interposition of God.

To this inquiry the answer must primarily be sought in the great specific forecasts which form the burden of Hebrew prophecy, and impart to it its unique character and force. These forecasts are three in number, and are to be gathered from a survey of the ancient Scriptures. To making that survey in a manner that will be sufficient, I hope, for the argument, without being too protracted and wearisome to the reader, the following sections will be devoted.

SECTION IV.

THE FORECAST OF A UNIVERSAL RELIGION.

THE first of the characteristic forecasts of Hebrew prophecy that invites attention is its forecast of a Universal Religion.

The Jewish policy was founded on the idea of isolation. Israel on one side, the world on the other; Israel holy to the Lord, the world profane; Israel in God's covenant, the world alien from it; such was the conception that lay at the root of the national life, and was embodied in the ordinances and institutions of the law, and infused a fiery strength into the patriotism of all orders and ranks in the land.

The God of Israel was Jehovah who had "severed them from all other people that they should be His,"¹ and whose covenant with them was based on this separation of them for Himself; "Thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God; the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto Himself, above all

¹ Lev. xx. 26.

people that are upon the face of the earth.”² Of this peculiar consecration the manifest presence of the Lord with them was to be the standing sign. “Wherein shall it be known,” said Moses, “that I and Thy people have found grace in Thy sight? is it not in that Thou goest with us? so shall we be separated, I and Thy people, from all the people that are on the face of the earth.”³ The boastful style of the nation accordingly was, “We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles”:⁴ and their dearest belief that “the Lord had chosen Israel for His peculiar treasure,”⁵ while the Gentiles were “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.”⁶

Of this idea, of the national consecration to Jehovah, the prophets were the foremost exponents. As patriots and politicians they were possessed by it. It inspired their burning addresses to their fellow-countrymen, and prescribed their policy towards the surrounding nations. To keep Israel a separate and holy people, dwelling apart in their mountain fastnesses under the peculiar protection of Jehovah,

² Deut. vii. 6.³ Exod. xxxiii. 16.⁴ Gal. ii. 15.⁵ Ps. cxxxv. 4.⁶ Eph. ii. 11, 12.

unentangled by foreign alliances, and uncontaminated by heathen customs, was the great aim which grew up with the nation's growth, and was handed on from prophet to prophet with accumulating intensity; and which survived the captivity to shape the reformation under Ezra and Nehemiah,⁷ to animate Jewish heroism in the Maccabæan wars, and finally in a perverted and intractable form to dash the nation to pieces against the mighty power of Rome.⁸

It need not be said how intensely local this

⁷ Ezra x.; Neh. xiii.

⁸ In Canon Rawlinson's *St. Paul in Damascus and Arabia* (Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge) there is a vivid description of the isolation kept up by the Jews living in heathen cities under the Roman empire: "The Jew would have no intercourse with his alien neighbours except for trading purposes; he would neither intermarry with them, nor take his meals with them, nor attend their places of education, nor join in their amusements, nor take part in their political gatherings, nor buy his meat in their markets, nor exchange a greeting with them except sullenly. Much less would he consent to any religious communion. Every grove, every temple, every place where worship was offered to a god whom he could not distinctly identify with his own God, was an abomination to him. He viewed the heathen as altogether given up to atheism or idolatry. It was his object to keep himself pure, so far as he possibly could, from all ceremonial as well as from all moral pollution; and for this purpose it was necessary that he should separate himself as completely as he could from those of another religion."

idea made the national religion; how it bound down ordinance and ceremonial to a fixed centre and limited priesthood, and set the whole mind of the people against the thought of the removal of the barriers that fenced them round, and the admission of the outlying world to share freely in their peculiar privileges and honours. Nothing was so exasperating to the Jew as the hint that Irsael's blessing might pass away to the heathen;⁹ or that a prophet might be withdrawn from Jerusalem by the mandate, "Depart, for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles."¹

Yet in spite of this hereditary training and these national prepossessions, there was a clear strain of an opposite kind ever blending with the utterances of the prophets. Notwithstanding the fiery patriotism and religious exclusiveness in which they were bred, a vision was continually rising before their gaze of the sweeping away of the separating barriers, within which their people "dwelt alone and were not numbered among the nations,"² and of the establishment of a universal religion, which should gather within its embrace all the tribes

⁹ Luke iv. 25—29.

¹ Acts xxii. 21, 22.

² Num. xxiii. 9.

of mankind. The very promise in which the nation read the original charta of its privileges asserted the future extension of its blessing to the world at large: "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed."³ The more glowing, in after ages, became the prophetic anticipations of Israel's future greatness, the less exclusive was their tenour and scope, and the more familiar to prophecy grew the idea that God would at last "visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name."⁴ Let us listen to the strain, as it peals loud and clear across the ages.

Thus sang the prophets as they bent their ardent gaze on the future:—

"In the last days when the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills, all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."⁵

When the light of Zion shall come, and the

³ Gen. xxii. 18.

⁴ Acts xv. 14.

⁵ Isa. ii. 2, 3; Micah iv. 1, 2.

glory of the Lord shall arise upon her, the Gentiles shall come to her light, and kings to the brightness of her rising. Her gates shall be open continually, that men may bring unto her the forces of the Gentiles, and that their kings may be brought.⁶ Her God shall become King over all the earth; in that day shall there be one Lord, and His name one.⁷ From one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, all flesh shall come to worship before the Lord.⁸ He will pour out His Spirit upon all flesh.⁹ His salvation shall be unto the ends of the earth.¹ From the rising of the sun and from the west they shall know that there is none beside God;² and the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.³

The little stone, cut out without hands, the emblem of the Kingdom which the God of heaven will set up, and which shall never be destroyed, shall become a great mountain, and shall fill the whole earth.⁴ The Lord has sworn by Himself, and the word has gone out of His mouth in righteousness, that unto Him every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall swear.⁵

⁶ Isa. lx. 1, 2, 11.⁷ Zech. xiv. 9.⁸ Isa. lxvi. 23.⁹ Joel ii. 28.¹ Isa. xlv. 22; xlix. 6.² Isa. xlv. 6.³ Hab. ii. 14.⁴ Dan. ii. 35, 44.⁵ Isa. xlv. 23.

So from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same, His name shall be great among the Gentiles ; and in every place incense shall be offered unto His name, and a pure offering ; for His name shall be great among the Gentiles.⁶

So sang the Hebrew prophets, and we know what the result has been. Are we not justified then in thinking, that in this forecast of a universal religion, embracing all nations, and gathering them to the worship of the one eternal God to whom Israel was consecrated, we hear the ring of genuine prophecy ? It was a forecast which was neither in harmony with the exclusiveness of the national genius, nor could have been borrowed from any foreign source. Religions, in those times, were of the soil ; each people had its own gods and its own worship, and was content to let the others keep their own. There were no exclusive claims, at least outside Judaism, to the possession of the truth ; no zeal to propagate a creed or a ritual ; no looking forward to religious conquests or spiritual empire. Whence, then, in the bosom alone of the petty tribe of Israel, the most isolated and the most jealously exclusive of all peoples, sprang up, in despite of all their pre-

⁶ Mal. i. 11.

possessions, their glowing anticipation of a religion that should go forth “conquering and to conquer,”⁷ and in the common possession of which there should be “no difference between the Jew and the Greek, and the same Lord over all should be rich unto all that call upon Him?”⁸ Does not the answer spring to our lips? It is because “prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.”⁹

⁷ Rev. vi. 2.⁸ Rom. x. 12.⁹ 2 Pet. i. 21.

SECTION V.

THE MESSIANIC FORECAST—FIRST ELEMENT, THE
FINAL TRIUMPH OF GOOD—SECOND ELEMENT,
A GLORIOUS MESSIAH.

THE second great forecast of Hebrew prophecy which we have to establish is one that more or less pervades and colours almost every part of it, from first to last. This is the presentiment of a Messiah, whom God would raise up in the latter days, to set all crooked things straight, and establish an everlasting kingdom of righteousness and truth.

The Messianic idea was a complex one, and each of its parts requires separate consideration.

At the foundation of it lay the ineradicable conviction of the ultimate triumph of good over evil. The genuine prophet, in whose heart the divine word was “as a burning fire shut up in his bones,”¹ walked among his fellow-men as one who was set apart, and commissioned to be in an especial sense a servant of righteousness, a

¹ Jer. xx. 9.

soldier of God in the great warfare against falsehood and wrong. The world was the battle-field, and Israel was chosen out of the nations to be the witness for God, the representative of His cause, the earthly image of His kingdom, the centre of the theocracy from which the world might learn the idea of the divine rule over the children of men. And however the long battle might fluctuate from one generation to another, and evil seem to approach its triumph, at one time through Israel's perverseness or apostasy, at another through the prevalence of the world's unhallowed tyranny and godless might, in the prophet's mind the final result was never doubtful. The enemies of God must perish, falsehood and wrong must be swept out of existence, the night of conflict and sorrow must at length pass away before the dawn of the everlasting day; and the blissful time should surely arrive, when "the Lord should reign in Mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before His ancients, gloriously." ²

Armed with this inspiring conviction, the prophet threw himself into the thick of the conflict. By turns a preacher of righteousness, a reprover of sin, a consoler in affliction, a

² Isa. xxiv. 23.

herald of deliverance, a denouncer of vengeance on the insolent heathen, a patriot, politician, and religious instructor, he sustained the cause of God, and led the little army of light in the part of the world-long warfare that fell in his own days. How often the battle would have to be renewed, and to what remote era the ultimate victory might be deferred, it was not given to him to know ; but across the din and the turmoil his straining eyes ever caught faint but rapture-giving glimpses of triumphant truth and goodness, filling the world with gladness in the unclouded light of Jehovah's countenance.

Now I do not found on this elementary part of the Messianic idea, taken by itself, any claim to a supernatural inspiration for the prophets of Israel. It might well have grown of itself out of their intense theistic instinct. They needed no voice from heaven to assure them, that the world of a righteous God could not finally and for ever be the prey of evil. The eternal power, wisdom, and goodness which made and ruled the world were to them a sufficient pledge of its ultimate redemption.

But the case is altered when from this elementary idea we go on to the next part of the Messianic conception. For the prophets were

enabled to foresee something more than the bare issue of the conflict. It was given to them also to perceive, that the triumph and the glory would centre in a Person. The burden of their prophecies was not only redemption, but a Redeemer. This was a forecast to which neither human sagacity, nor the unassisted theistic instinct, would naturally give birth. The victory of good over evil might easily have been expected to be wrought otherwise; by a gradual amelioration, by a "stream of tendency," by each servant of righteousness contributing a little towards it; so that it would march onwards with an almost insensible progress, like the ordinary growths of civilization and science. But such general ideas as these did not enter into the prophetic forecast of the future age of purity and happiness. That fastened on a Person, and was summed up in a Deliverer anointed for His office by God; in a Messiah, and not in an impersonal tendency or growth.

That such was the real expectation of the prophets, and is the true interpretation of their utterances, and not a mere gloss unwarrantably put on them by Christian expositors in subsequent times, we have the clear and decisive attestation of historical fact.

The Messianic idea was indubitably not of

Christian, but Jewish, origin. Long before the birth of Jesus, the whole mind of the chosen nation was impregnated and possessed by the expectation of a Messiah.³ That it was so we have ample evidence in the ancient interpretations of prophecy recorded in the Targums, and in the earlier Rabbinical writings, and in contemporary Pagan literature; indeed the fact is universally acknowledged, and is beyond dispute.⁴ The reader of the New Testament finds it underlying the sacred narratives, in a manner which leaves no doubt of its historical reality. He will remember how, when John the Baptist was interrogated by the Pharisees about his office,⁵ and again when the claims of Jesus were under debate,⁶ the question was never raised, "Is a Messiah to be looked for?" but only, "Is this the right person?" The truth of the expectation was universally conceded, and the entire debate turned on the identification of the Claimant. How could this

³ Dean Milman's *Hist. of Christ.*, vol. i. p. 54.

⁴ "It is very certain that the Jews, before the coming of Christ, gave this construction to their Scriptures; they even looked beyond the letter of their sacred books, and conceived the testimony of the Messiah to be the soul and end of the commandment."—Bp. Hurd, *Second Sermon on Prophecy*.

⁵ John i. 19, 20.

⁶ Matt. xi. 3 xxvi. 63; John vii. 26; Acts ix. 22.

universal conviction of a Messiah to come ever have prevailed, if the ancient Scriptures had not testified concerning Him with no uncertain voice? It is utterly beside the mark to say, that subsequent events led to a meaning being put on the Scriptures which did not truly belong to them. The meaning was found there before there were any events to suggest it. If we cannot find it there now, surely the cause must be sought in our own blindness, not in the silence or obscurity of the written prophecies.

The student of the Old Testament, who is not content with a superficial glance at its contents, and does not approach it with a predetermination to shut his eyes to everything that does not square with his theories, will be at no loss to understand how the Messianic expectation arose out of its teaching. To him it will be plain that if no personal Messiah, of more than human dignity and grace, be foretold in it, a large part of the prophetic writings would be justly chargeable with unmeaning and incredible exaggeration; and the more deeply he enters into the spirit of those writings, and perceives their moral earnestness and ardour for truth and reality, the more will such a view of them appear to him unworthy and inadmissible.

It is true that each prophet spoke from his own standpoint, dealt with the affairs of his own time, and clothed his anticipations of the future in the form and costume furnished to him by contemporary events. This was in accordance with the genius of Hebrew prophecy ; it ever rooted itself in the present, and borrowed its shape and colour from the surrounding circumstances. Hence to a superficial observer it might easily appear to be always limited to the immediate circle of events, and to have no outlook towards the distant future. But a closer examination will soon lead us to distrust this first impression. We have only to mark the course which each great prophetic announcement invariably ran. Beginning with the present emergency, the contemporary fears, or sufferings, or sins, and delivering such messages of encouragement, or such reproofs, consolations, or warnings, as the immediate case demanded, the prophet soon breaks away from the comparatively petty occasion ; and lifting his glance to the heavens, and widening it to the ends of the earth, rises into sublime strains of universal judgment, deliverance, and triumph, such as entirely transcend the interests and events of his own day.

To make it clear how the prophetic utter-

ances were continually rising from the level of the immediate circumstances to the loftier topic of Messianic hopes, quotation at some length is unavoidable; and I proceed, as briefly as possible, to lay before the reader some of the leading instances.

Here is a psalmist⁷ declaring that, in spite of all opposition, God will set His King on His holy hill of Zion. Probably the establishment of David's throne over the whole of Israel is intended, and furnishes the immediate theme; at any rate, some event of that class must have prompted the psalm. But no sooner is the announcement made than the language swells to loftier proportions, and altogether transcends the occasion. "Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten thee. Ask of Me, and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron, thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."

Here is another psalmist,⁸ singing apparently of the splendour of Solomon's reign. Peaceful prosperity, abundant riches, tribute from the neighbouring tribes, a wise and just administration, form the immediate burden of his song.

⁷ Ps. ii.

⁸ Ps. lxxii

But when presently we observe him breaking away from the local and temporary current of events, to enlarge his strain with the far vaster topics of an everlasting dominion and a divine glory and beneficence; when of his royal hero he pours forth the stupendous prediction, "He shall have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. All kings shall fall down before him, all nations shall serve him. He shall deliver the needy when he crieth, the poor also, and him that hath no helper. His name shall endure for ever; his name shall be continued as long as the sun; and men shall be blessed in him; all nations shall call him blessed;" how can we acquit the sweet singer of preposterous and almost blasphemous exaggeration, unless on the supposition that the spirit of prophecy has seized upon him, and that "a greater than Solomon is here"?

So also is it with others of the psalms, which like those just cited appear to have originated in the praise of some victorious or popular king.

There is, for instance, the marriage ode,¹ in which the royal bridegroom is not only praised for his beauty and grace, but addressed in such

⁹ Matt. xii. 42.

¹ Ps. xlv.

terms of laudation and honour as rise into a strain of worship. "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever; the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre. Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness; therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows."

There is the psalm² of the exaltation, of which we have lost all trace of the historical occasion. "The Lord said unto my lord,³ Sit thou at My right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever, after the order of Melchisedek."

Then there is the probably later psalm,⁴ of the pleading of David's covenant on behalf of the nation in its adversity, where the promise outruns all local and temporal limitations, and swells into a strain which can belong only to a far grander future. "I will make him My first-born, higher than the kings of the earth. My mercy will I keep for him for evermore, and My covenant shall stand fast with him. His

² Ps. cx.

³ Probably equivalent in its original and lower meaning to "my lord the king." According to some expositors this Psalm commemorates the going forth to war of David, or some later king, with a divine augury of triumph.

⁴ Ps. lxxvii

seed also will I make to endure for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of My lips. Once have I sworn by My holiness that I will not lie unto David. His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before Me. It shall be established for ever as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven."

At a later date still, in a psalm⁵ evidently composed after the Captivity, when the temporal royalty had finally departed from David's line, the like assurance is once more given. "The Lord hath sworn in truth unto David. He will not shrink from it; Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne. For the Lord hath chosen Zion; He hath desired it for His habitation. There will I make the horn of David to bud; I have ordained a lamp for Mine anointed. His enemies will I clothe with shame, but upon himself shall his crown flourish."

Now let it be remembered that these and other psalms like them were the compositions of an order of persons, whose especial mission it was to protest against idolatry, and jealously guard the honour of the God of Israel; and

⁵ Ps. cxxxii.

that their fervid strains were no independent nor unconnected utterances, but parts of a great stream of progressive teaching, embodying the deepest convictions and brightest hopes of the nation, into whose solemn worship they were grafted as a permanent and most precious element. Let this be borne in mind, and I think the conclusion will be reached, that no explanation of them is sufficient or fairly probable, which does not recognize in them a meaning transcending the temporary occasion, and rising into a mysterious forecast of One greater than David or Solomon or any of their successors, who in the latter days should be manifested as God's anointed King, the Messiah who should bring about "the restitution of all things."⁶

This inference is greatly strengthened, when from the Psalms we turn to the prophetic books, which, beginning from about the middle or end of the ninth century before our era, stretch across a space of perhaps six or seven hundred eventful years. The exact dates of the earliest and latest books may be doubtful, but the uncertainty of the limits does not affect their testimony, except in one instance, that of the apocalyptic book of Daniel, to

⁶ Acts iii. 21.

which special reference will be made in its place.

How rich Isaiah is in grand Messianic anticipations, ever piercing with rapt and eager vision beyond the surrounding circumstances, and exhausting all the resources of poetic imagery to portray the glory that seemed to the prophet's eye to glow in the far future!

When in a dangerous political crisis, arising out of a confederation between the kings of Syria and of Israel to attack and reduce to subjection the kingdom of Judah, Isaiah was instructed to foretell the breaking up of the alliance and the death of the hostile kings, and to give Ahaz, the faint-hearted king of Judah, a sign, in the birth of a child, of the coming deliverance; his prevision extends far beyond the occasion, and his language labours with the thought of a greater child and a more glorious deliverance. The prophetic rapture comes upon him, and with kindled imagination and hope he foresees a time, when "a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel;"⁷ and breaks forth into

⁷ Isa. vii. 14. "Which being interpreted is, God with us" (Matt. i. 23.) The English reader needs perhaps to be warned that Isaiah's language does not necessarily imply a *miraculous* conception.

the exulting strain, "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined. . . . For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice, from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this."⁸

Amidst all the confusions of the time, with dissensions and idolatries and evil doings within the land, and the ominous shadow of the mighty Assyrian empire darkening over it from the outside, on Isaiah's mind rose a vision of the setting right of all things, and the coming of a golden age. The passage must be given at length, for it is too beautiful to be abridged. "There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots; and the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding,

⁸ Isa. ix. 2, 6, 7.

the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord; and shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears; but with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins. The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."⁹

Again, under the dread of invasion by Assyria, when the people, forgetting the covenant of Jehovah with them, were clamouring for an alliance with Egypt, and Isaiah lifted up his voice to rebuke this trust in an arm of flesh,

⁹ Isa. xi. 1—9.

and to assure them that if they "turned unto Him from whom the children of Israel have deeply revolted," "the Lord of Hosts would come down to fight for mount Zion, and for the hill thereof;"¹ the prophet's thoughts instinctively sprang forward to a better time, when "a King shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment. And a man shall be as an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place; as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. And the eyes of them that see shall not be dim, and the ears of them that hear shall hearken. The heart also of the rash shall understand knowledge, and the tongue of the stammerer shall be ready to speak plainly;" a time when "the Spirit shall be poured out from on high, and the wilderness be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest. Then judgment shall dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field. And the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever."²

Once more, in that wonderful series of prophecies respecting the "Servant of Jehovah," which are spread through several of the most

¹ Isa. xxxi. 1, 4, 6.

² Isa. xxxii. 1—4, 15—17.

remarkable and glowing chapters of our Book of Isaiah, whether they belong to the remains of "the son of Amoz,"³ or are the production of some later prophet, "the great Unnamed,"⁴ raised up in the spirit and power of Isaiah, to prophesy during the captivity; in these most remarkable outpourings of the prophetic spirit, in its grandest and most spiritual mood, it seems impossible to avoid perceiving how thoroughly they are impregnated and pervaded by a Messianic forecast. In that mysterious agent, elect of God, called in righteousness, endowed with the Divine Spirit, appointed for a covenant of the people and a light of the Gentiles; whose mission should be to open the blind eyes and bring the prisoners out of prison, to establish the earth and cause to inherit the desolate heritages; to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel, and to be God's salvation unto the ends of the earth;⁵—if in that wonderful personage some great anointed minister of the divine purposes be not shadowed forth, it seems to me that language more misleading could scarcely have been employed.

From Isaiah we pass to Micah, who was partly contemporary with him, and who, in the alarm excited by the prospect of an Assyrian

³ Isa. i. 1.⁴ Ewald.⁵ Isa. xlii. 1, 6, 7; xlix. 6, 8.

invasion, encouraged the people by foretelling the rise of "a man who shall be the peace when the Assyrian shall come into our land."⁶ Here again we observe the same phenomenon, of the singular widening of the prophet's outlook, and heightening of the tone of his prediction beyond and above anything that was proportioned to the occasion; suggesting that his thoughts leaped forward from the circumstances of the time, to anticipate the appearance on the world's scene of a far greater deliverer. "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Israel, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto Me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting. . . . And he shall stand and feed in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God; and they shall abide, for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth."⁷

We pass on a century and come to the sad

⁶ Micah v. 5.

⁷ Micah v. 2, 4. The view taken by many, that this passage originally indicated the Davidic lineage, rather than the birthplace, of the promised deliverer seems worthy of notice, as obviating the objection that a direct prediction of so minute a circumstance as the name of the village where Christ should be born would be scarcely in keeping with the general method and character of Messianic prophecy.

time when darkness was fast closing in on the kingdom of Judah, and the throne of David's line was trembling to its fall. Ere city and temple went down with a crash, and the people were swept into captivity, Jeremiah, the prophet of tears, lifted up his voice in repeated warnings, rebukes, and entreaties; and even in the midst of his fears and sorrows there rose on his soul a vision of distant glory, and he poured forth his hope in the bright strain which occurs twice in his collected prophecies:—"Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely; and this is his name whereby he shall be called, The Lord our Righteousness."^s

Even from the depths of the captivity the like voice of promise was heard, to keep alive the hope of the exiles. By the river of Chebar Ezekiel cheered the remnant of his afflicted people with such Messianic passages as these: "Thus saith the Lord God; Behold I, even I,

^s Jer. xxiii. 5, 6; xxxiii. 15, 16. It is doubtful whether the last clause does not mean that the ransomed nation shall be called by a name signifying "Jehovah is our Righteousness."

will both search My sheep and seek them out. . . . I will save My flock, and they shall be no more a prey, and I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. And I the Lord will be their God, and My servant David a prince among them; I, the Lord, have spoken it.”⁹ And again: “And David My servant shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd; they shall also walk in My judgments, and observe My statutes, and do them. . . . Moreover, I will make a covenant of peace with them; and it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; and I will place them, and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore.”¹

It may be doubtful whether we are to place the apocalyptic visions of the book of Daniel at this epoch, or whether they belong to one which followed two or three centuries later. On a point on which critical opinion is so much divided, I do not presume to pronounce any judgment of my own. But the uncertainty of their date does not materially affect their value for our present purpose. Whether earlier or later, they add a mystic testimony to the witness of the

⁹ Ezek. xxxiv. 11, 22—24.

¹ Ezek. xxxvii. 24, 26.

preceding prophets, and speak not indistinctly of the connexion of God's future and universal kingdom of righteousness with a personal Head. "I saw," says the Seer, "in the night visions, and behold one like the son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before Him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed."²

Now it is quite true, that our translation gives to this passage a definiteness that does not properly belong to it. The original speaks only of *a* son of man;³ and as the explanation which is afterwards granted says that "the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him;"⁴ there is some reason for seeing in the expression "a son of man," at least in its primary intention, a personification, in an

² Dan. vii. 13, 14.

³ See *Speaker's Commentary*.

⁴ Dan. vii. 27.

individual representative, of the whole body of the saints afterwards mentioned.⁵ Moreover, if the later date assigned by some critics to the passage be the true one, it may possibly be that the immediate and primary scope of the passage is limited to the triumphs of the Jews under their Maccabæan leaders, as some expositors maintain.

But even granting the possibility of all this, which for the purpose of our argument is the only safe course, it may be reasonably urged that the elevated tone of the whole passage almost irresistibly carries on the mind to a far loftier issue. The primary meaning need not be the whole meaning. In the interpretation of sacred prophecy, if we would catch its undertone and understand its mysterious hints, nothing may be neglected. Here we can hardly help thinking that the expectation of the Messianic kingdom, foretold by the earlier prophets, exalts and colours the seer's thought; his anticipation seems to swell beyond the immediate occasion, to embrace the time when that kingdom shall be set up, finally and for ever, in the glorified persons of all God's faithful servants. And when this establishment of the divine rule is mystically figured by the

⁵ See Stanley's *Jewish Church*, vol. iii.

delivery of the kingdom to "a son of man," with the utmost celestial pomp and solemnity, and the widest promises of universality and perpetuity, I think that we should miss something of the full significance of the symbols, if we did not discern in them a foreshadowing of One, in whom the wider and more lasting dominion shall centre, as being emphatically the Son of man, the Head and Representative of the saints, "the First-born among many brethren."⁶

We now pass on to the time subsequent to the return from Babylon, when the prophetic voice was again for a season heard in the land of Israel. If the annihilation of the northern kingdom, and the carrying away of Judah into captivity, could not prevail, as we have seen, to extinguish the Messianic hope, it might well be expected to burn brightly after the restoration of the exiles to their beloved land. Accordingly, from none of the three subsequent prophetic books which are extant is the inspiring theme absent.

Let us turn first to Haggai, the earliest of the three. To what else than the days of Messiah can his language point, when to encourage the little band of weak and trembling

⁶ Rom. viii. 29.

Jews he pours forth the lofty and solemn strain, "Thus saith the Lord of hosts; yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come; and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts?"⁷

The prophecies ascribed to Zechariah, who came next, fall into two divisions; the former of which, comprising the first eight chapters, undoubtedly belongs to this period, while the last six chapters may possibly be the composition of an earlier prophet, in the years preceding the captivity.⁸ But throughout both parts of the book the bright Messianic expectation breaks out again and again, in strains of

⁷ Haggai ii. 6, 7. It is but fair to state that the expression here rendered "the desire of all nations," and popularly applied to the Messiah, as being He for whom all nations were consciously or unconsciously waiting and longing, has a very different meaning put upon it by some expositors. They understand the prophet to say that *the choicest or best of all nations* shall come to worship Jehovah in His temple. If this interpretation, which is also that of the Septuagint, be adopted, something of the peculiar point and definiteness of the passage will obviously disappear; but its general Messianic character will still be sufficiently plain.

⁸ See *Speaker's Commentary*, Introduction to Zechariah, sec. iii.

exultation and triumph strangely contrasted with the actual feebleness and precarious condition of the people to whom, whether earlier or later, they were addressed. Here is an instance: "Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion; for lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the Lord. And many nations shall be joined to the Lord in that day, and shall be My people; and I will dwell in the midst of thee, and thou shalt know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me unto thee. And the Lord shall inherit Judah His portion in the holy land, and shall choose Jerusalem again. Be silent, O all flesh, before the Lord; for He is raised up out of His holy habitation."⁹

Again, we find Zechariah taking up on two different occasions the famous prediction of the Branch, which in slightly different forms is found in Isaiah,¹ Jeremiah,² and Ezekiel;³ and while apparently making some immediate application of it, he connects it with a promise which in its fulness can belong only to the Messiah. "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Behold the man whose name is the Branch; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord; even he

⁹ Zech. ii. 10—13.

¹ Isa. iv. 2; xi. 1.

² Jer. xxiii. 5; xxxiii. 15.

³ Ezek. xxxiv. 29.

shall build the temple of the Lord; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne; and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.”⁴

From the same prophet also we receive the celebrated prediction, which sounds across the ages with a strange predictive emphasis. “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion: shout, O daughter of Jerusalem; behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.”⁵

One prophet only remains, the last of the long

⁴ Zech. vi. 12, 13.

⁵ Zech. ix. 9. It is obvious that we must not press the literal prediction, “riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass,” *against the sceptic*, for two reasons; first, because it is open to him to say that, whatever the prophecy originally meant, which was probably a poetical contrast of Israel’s peaceful king with the warrior kings of the great Gentile monarchies, borne along in their war chariots in the pride of martial pomp, the corresponding action of Jesus was done, consciously and expressly, to fit it with a fulfilment; and secondly, because the sceptic does not acknowledge the historical character of the Gospels, which are our only authority for the fulfilment. As Dean Lyall candidly remarks on the passage: “This would seem to have been a mark so easily assumed, that it ought not to be numbered among the notes of the Messiah As a prophecy it can have little weight, except in confirmation of a foregone conclusion.”—*Pro. Proph.* p. 214.

line, who about a century later once more broke the silence, and left to his people the solemn warning to be on the outlook for Him that should come. In Malachi's message the great prophetic testimony is summed up and brought to a point. "Behold, I will send My messenger, and he shall prepare the way before Me; and the Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant whom ye delight in; behold, He shall come, saith the Lord of hosts. But who may abide the day of His coming? and who shall stand when He appeareth? . . . But unto you that fear My name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings."⁶

Such was the continuous burden of Hebrew prophecy, a strain reiterated and amplified from prophet to prophet, and broadening down for half a dozen centuries. Now what, 'as

⁶ Mal. iii. 1, 2; iv. 2. To the foregoing quotations I have forborne to add the very obscure passage in Gen. xlix. 10, from the blessing of Judah, because its reference to the Messiah seems to be extremely doubtful. It is never alluded to in the New Testament; everywhere else Shiloh means simply the town in Ephraim where the tabernacle was set up; and on critical grounds we are told that the rendering "until Shiloh come" must be given up for "until he come to Shiloh." The Septuagint version gets rid of Shiloh altogether, and translates "until the things laid up for him shall come."—See Smith's *Dictionary of the Bible*, art. *Shiloh*.

intelligent and honest students of this unique literature, are we to make of it? Can we really satisfy ourselves with seeing in the psalmists and prophets no more than flatterers of contemporary kings, or dealers in Oriental exaggerations? To be content with such a meagre explanation, in the face of the lofty theism, the intense sincerity, and the courageous protests against idolatry and falsehood, which stamp their writings as a whole with a divine elevation and force, would, it seems to me, convict the critic of utter incapacity to appreciate them. Or shall we dispose of them as patriotic enthusiasts and idealists, deluding themselves with expectations of an impossible national greatness? Had there been in the whole range of their compositions just a single instance or two of such utterances to be found, it might perhaps have been urged with some degree of plausibility, that in these exceptional cases the prophet might possibly have been carried away by his enthusiasm beyond the bounds of sober truth or rational anticipation, and that we must clip the pinions of his "winged words," and tie them down to some petty event of his own time. But a continuous tradition, and continually growing amplification of the theme, cannot be so easily disposed of. It is no indi-

vidual peculiarity or private fancy of one prophet, or two, that we have to account for and estimate, but the uniform habit and consentient testimony of the whole order. Nor is it at all more satisfactory, or in accordance with the most evident features of their writings, to describe them as a tribe of imitators or copyists, who repeated and handed on with fanciful amplifications some lofty poetic strain, to which in the primitive age of the nation an original genius may have swept his prophetic harp. For nothing on the whole is more characteristic of the Hebrew prophets than their individuality and independence of each other, and the vital relation in which the utterances of each stood to the events of his own age. Yet, with all their differences, all their idiosyncracies, they agree in this, that their common glance is onwards to a bright future; their common hope is fastened on some great personage to come, who should be, under God, the restorer of Israel, and the redeemer of the world from sorrow and wrong.

Even on the extreme supposition, that each prophet and psalmist in turn was consciously thinking of nothing beyond his own present, or the immediate future, and was unaware of transcending in his language the circumstances

of his own time, even on this supposition the inference from their united testimony is not materially weakened.⁷ The result of their prophesyings and sacred minstrelsy stands before us in their collected remains, and it is one of an unparalleled and most impressive character. Whatever each by himself may possibly have thought or intended, their successive contributions to the prophetic literature of their nation are found to fit harmoniously together, and to make up a consistent whole. The individual workmen might perhaps furnish their separate portions to the work, without possessing any clear conception of the structure to which they were contributing; but the edifice slowly rising out of their unintelligent labours would not be the less real, nor the less

7 "The showing, even to a high probability, if that could be, that the prophets thought of some other events, in such and such predictions, and not those at all which Christians allege to be completions of those predictions; or that such and such prophecies are capable of being applied to other events than those to which Christians apply them; this would not confute or destroy the force of the argument from prophecy, even with regard to those very instances. . . . The question is, whether a series of prophecy has been fulfilled in a natural or proper, that is, in any real sense of the words of it. For such completion is equally a proof of foresight more than human, whether the prophets are, or are not, supposed to have understood it in a different sense."—Butler, *Analogy*, ii. 7.

in accordance with a fore-ordained design. What the method or process of prophecy was, while it was gradually growing up during the ages into a complete and mature body or system, is not the essential question, but what is its character, what its outcome, when it has reached its full development, and stands in its perfect proportions before the world. And about this there really is no room for controversy. As I have before remarked, history itself has conclusively settled it. The prophetic literature, when seen in its connexion and completeness, did create in the Jewish mind the invincible expectation of a personal Messiah; an expectation not limited to this or that school of learned thought or traditional lore, but unanimous and universal; not superficial nor transient, but so deep-rooted and abiding that nothing has ever been able to eradicate it.⁸

⁸ "In whatever form or character they expected him to appear, King, Conqueror, or even God, in this the Jewish race agreed, that the Messiah was to be the King, the Conqueror, the God of Israel."—Milman's *Hist. of Jews*, vol. i. p. 425.

SECTION VI.

THE MESSIANIC FORECAST CONTINUED—THIRD ELEMENT, A SUFFERING MESSIAH.

WE have now considered two elements of the Messianic forecast, as it is to be discovered by an examination of the Old Testament Scriptures ; namely, the anticipation of final triumph for God's cause, and the centering of that triumph in a Person, whom God would raise up and anoint for the purpose in the latter days.

But these two elements do not complete the prophetic idea. There is a third, mysteriously and darkly interwoven with them, which to the Jew has been a standing source of perplexity. This is the element of suffering, mingled with the triumph. The Messiah should indeed come in the power of the most High, and conquer, and reign in glory ; but there are intimations, hints, whispers in an undertone, that the victory and the redemption should only come through humiliation and sore struggle, and even rejection by His own people. How this darker side

of the Messianic forecast is exhibited in the Old Testament, we must now apply ourselves to examine.

In this part of our inquiry, I venture to suggest to the reader, there is especial need of a sensitive and scrupulous candour. The materials to be examined may be said to be almost too delicate to bear the rough handling of critical discussion. The inquirer must honestly try to enter into the circumstances, the thoughts, the emotions, of the ancient writers ; to watch the play of the shadows that mingle with the lights, in the visions of the future which rose vague and mysterious on their awe-struck souls ; to catch glimpses of a background that is mostly veiled ; to listen for the faint notes of disappointment and sorrow, that are almost drowned in the songs of triumph to which they swept the harp of prophecy, and for the whisperings of judgment that mix strangely with the hopes and promises of the covenant. It is only by putting himself into sympathetic relation with the prophetic strains, and laying his mind open to all their varying moods, that he can hope to be, intellectually and spiritually, sensitive enough to appreciate their testimony to this part of the Messianic idea, which from its very nature must have been

kept comparatively in the background, and veiled in a mysterious sadness.

For observe how the case stood. The prophets were, as we have seen, intensely national and patriotic. The feeling that Israel was God's peculiar people, the exclusive heirs of His covenant and representatives of His cause, reached in them its highest pitch. When therefore there arose on their ardent souls a vision of the ultimate triumph of God's cause, and of the universal establishment of the worship of Jehovah, through a Messiah who should spring out of the chosen nation, they were impelled by all their dearest wishes and hopes, and all their most familiar habits of thought, to identify the future of Israel with this bright vision, and to array the national destinies in the glory of the latter days. To conceive of a triumph for the cause of Israel's God, in which Israel should not share; of a glorious and universal kingdom of Israel's own Messiah, from all part in which Israel by its own perverseness and apostasy should shut itself out; could not have been to them otherwise than inexpressibly repugnant, and barely even possible. But suppose that this tremendous catastrophe was indeed to happen,—for that is the Christian hypothesis. Suppose that

in the radiant Messianic forecast and hope Israel's sin and fall and casting away must of necessity be included. In what way might so strange a dislocation of the apparently fore-ordained course of events, so tragic a frustration and dashing to pieces of the national hope, be expected to be announced by the reluctant organs of prophecy? Surely not in plain, blunt predictions, which might either have crushed the nation's energies under a withering sense of inevitable doom, or else have stimulated them to thwart, if possible, the mysterious purpose. Rather should we look for the announcement in obscure hints and dark sayings; in reluctant warnings of what sin might possibly bring to pass; in flickering shadows occasionally falling across the track of glory; in types and enigmas hard to decipher: so that the awful secret, although told, might still remain a secret, until the future had worked itself out, and the mystery of God been accomplished.

Such is the way in which, as it seems to me, this third element of the Messianic forecast might be expected to appear in the prophetic writings, supposing it to be a real component of the idea; and if so, to discern and appreciate it would be especially reserved for candid and

sensitive hearts. In the temper of mind thus indicated let us again open the sacred Volume.

We have already noticed that the genius of Hebrew prophecy is to root itself in the present; to take its departure from surrounding circumstances, and, while apparently dealing with them, to expand and soar away to wider hopes and grander events. Thus the contemporary king, or deliverer, or witness for righteousness, or servant of Jehovah, of whom the prophet or psalmist is speaking, serves as a figure on which to hang the Messianic prediction, and becomes in some measure a type or shadow of Him that is to come.

In the story or description, then, of these typical personages, it may be possible from time to time to trace some faint foreshadowings of Messiah's person or work. Does the prophetic writer represent them as undergoing a hard struggle and treading a weary path of suffering, ere God vindicates them and brings them to honour? It may possibly be thus that a glimpse is for a moment permitted of the sufferings through which He who is the "King of kings,"¹ the "faithful and true Witness,"² the divine "Servant,"³ must enter into His

¹ Matt. xxv. 34. Rev. xvii. 14.

² Rev. iii. 14.

³ Matt. xii. 18. Phil. ii. 7.

glory. Has the prophet reason to charge his people with opposing and rejecting the messenger sent to them by God? It may be thus that Israel's attitude towards the Divine Messenger,⁴ who should visit them in the fulness of time, is dimly foreshadowed. Not that, without the clue being put into our hands, it is necessary that we should have been able to detect the transition from the lower to the higher topic, or to separate between the type and its far-off fulfilment. It is enough if, when the clue has been given, and we come back to the prophetic writings with hearts spiritually quickened and on the alert, we are able to read (as it were) between the lines, and comprehend the mysterious intimations, which would otherwise have sorely perplexed us, or else altogether have eluded our perception.

With these ideas in our minds, let us dip again into the Book of Psalms.

In the 22nd, we have a very remarkable composition, one of a class to which, I believe, no parallel can be found outside the Bible, search as we may through the whole round of ancient literature. Two-thirds of it are a pathetic appeal to God from the lowest depths of abandonment and oppression. The sufferer

⁴ John xx. 21. Heb. iii. 1. John xii. 37-41.

has been God's chosen servant from his birth,⁵ but now he complains of being forsaken.⁶ The wicked have prevailed against him; they have attacked him like strong bulls and roaring lions;⁷ they have spoiled him of his garments;⁸ they have pierced his hands and his feet;⁹ they taunt him with his pious trust in God;¹ he faints and is ready to expire.² Then the strain suddenly changes, and sings of deliverance and triumph. Rescued and brought to honour, he will give thanks in the great congregation.³ But he does not end there. He treats his deliverance as a matter of national congratulation and a cause of more than national blessings. He not only calls on his fellow-countrymen to join him in his thanksgiving,—“Ye that fear the Lord, praise Him; all ye the seed of Jacob, glorify Him; and fear Him, all ye the seed of Israel;”⁴ but breaks out into an announcement which draws the whole world within the consequences of his triumph. “All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn unto the Lord, and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before Thee. For the

⁵ vv. 9, 10. ⁶ v. 1. ⁷ vv. 12, 13. ⁸ v. 17.

⁹ v. 16. Some translators render this, “like a lion on my hands and my feet.” It is remarkable that the passage is not among those applied by the Evangelists to the Crucifixion.

¹ vv. 7, 8. ² vv. 14, 15. ³ vv. 22, 25. ⁴ v. 23.

kingdom is the Lord's, and He is the Governor among the nations. . . . They shall come, and shall declare His righteousness, unto a people that shall be born, that He hath done this."⁵

It is the latter part of this psalm that especially arrests our attention. Here is that sudden expansion of thought, and exaltation of the style, above anything that the apparent occasion can justify, which has before seemed to indicate the entrance of the Messianic idea. The personal deliverance swells beyond all private proportions, and has for its sequence the setting up of God's Kingdom over the whole world. Now we cannot charge such a writer, in his mood of solemn thanksgiving, with uttering wild extravagance and nonsense; yet how can his character for sobriety and good sense be vindicated, except by viewing him as carried out of himself and his own individual circumstances, by some presage of the Messiah sweeping across his spirit? But if in his deliverance and its consequences he prefigures the Messiah, in however dim a manner, is it not possible, we ask, nay probable, and even required by the coherence of the composition, that he foreshadows the Messiah in his sufferings also?

For let us remember that this psalm does not

⁵ vv. 27, 28, 31.

stand alone. The sixty-ninth is an almost exact parallel to it. There, too, the suppliant is God's servant, the champion of His cause,⁶ in sustaining which he is brought down to the lowest depths of suffering;⁷ there, too, the pathetic lament is suddenly turned into an exulting burst of praise, far transcending the private occasion. "Let the heaven and earth praise Him, the seas, and everything that moveth therein. For God will save Zion, and will build the cities of Judah: that they may dwell there, and have it in possession. The seed also of His servants shall inherit it, and they that love His name shall dwell therein."⁸

There are other psalms, besides, which furnish briefer examples of a like unexpected expansion of the idea and phrase, in the transition from humiliation or suffering to exaltation or joy. A signal one may be pointed out in the 16th, where nothing is suggested that seems to lie beyond the writer's individual experience till near the close; but then, while expressing his confidence that God would throw His protection over him in the hour of darkness, he suddenly identifies himself with the Holy One of God, and rises into a strain which, if not prophetic and Messianic, appears wholly unaccountable. "Thou

⁶ vv. 6—9.

⁷ vv. 1—3, 20, 21.

⁸ vv. 31—36.

wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt show me the path of life; in Thy presence is fulness of joy: at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.”⁹

To avoid prolixity I will refer to one more only of the sacred lyrics. This is the 118th, apparently composed after the captivity to celebrate the rebuilding of the city and temple. Here also the strain swells from an ordinary giving of praise for help and deliverance, into one which strikes the mind as burdened with a mysterious grandeur, somewhat beyond the occasion. To understand its force we must glance at the prophetic passage to which allusion is made by the psalmist. Isaiah, when threatening the rebellious with judgment, and foretelling a day when “the Lord of hosts shall be for a crown of glory, and for a diadem of beauty, unto the residue of His people,”¹ had made the mysterious announcement; “Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious

⁹ vv. 10, 11. The plural reading “holy ones,” though preferred by some critics, has too little support to entitle it to serious notice. Even if adopted, it would by no means destroy the Messianic presage with which the passage seems to be instinct, but only widen its basis by including others in the writer’s glorious hope.

¹ Isa. xxviii. 5.

corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.”² What this exactly meant, it would be difficult to guess, if it stood alone. Some peculiarly solemn and sacred means of deliverance seems to be hinted at, which should act like a test, severing between the good and the evil, being to the one “a sanctuary,” as a similar prophecy says, and to the other “a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence.”³ But when we approach this difficult passage with the Messianic idea in our minds, we can hardly avoid seeing in it a presage of Him whom God would send to Zion for salvation and judgment. This foundation stone, tried and precious and sure, solemnly laid in Zion by the Eternal, for salvation to the faithful and judgment to the scornful and rebellious,⁴ can it point to less than the Messiah, or mean less than that to some He would prove a stone of stumbling and rock of offence? Now it is to this mysterious Messianic passage that the composer of the 118th psalm plainly refers, when he breaks out in the exulting strain:—“The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. This is the Lord’s doing; it is marvellous in our eyes. This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will

² v. 16.³ Isa. viii. 14.⁴ Isa. xxviii. 14.

rejoice and be glad in it. . . . Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord ; we have blessed you out of the house of the Lord. God is the Lord which hath showed us light ; bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar.”⁵ And if that be the reference, then here we have another of those amplifications of the immediate theme, which are already familiar to us as evidence of its transition into the Messianic sphere of thought ; and we learn from the psalm that the Messiah should suffer rejection from the leaders of the nation, before He should be exalted to honour.

Before we go on to search in the prophetical books for testimonies to the existence of an element of suffering in the Messianic forecast, let me ask the reader to pause for a moment, and remind himself of the exact line in which our inquiry is proceeding.

Every reader of the New Testament knows, that the passages from the psalms and from Isaiah, just referred to, are applied by the evangelists and apostles to the passion and exaltation of Jesus Christ.⁶ In those passages they recognize Messianic predictions ; in Him

⁵ Ps. cxviii. 22—24, 26, 27.

⁶ Matt. xxi. 42 ; xxvii. 35, 46. John ii. 17 ; xix. 29, 30. Acts ii. 25—31 ; iv. 11 ; xiii. 35—37. Rom. xv. 3. 1 Pet. ii. 6—8.

they discern the fulfilment of them. But at the present stage of our argument we are not concerned with the question of fulfilment at all. We have not got so far as yet. Our business now is simply with the passages, as they stand in the ancient Scriptures. Looking at them there, we want to find out what they mean; whether they contain any prophetic element at all, and if so, of what nature it is. They might prophesy, and yet prophesy falsely; that is another question, to be hereafter considered. Our present question is, have they any outlook towards the future at all? do they express any expectation of what shall be?

In pursuing this inquiry, we notice in these passages the presence of that forecast of the triumph of God's cause, through the instrumentality of a personal agent or champion, which we have already traced in other parts of the Old Testament Scriptures; but here it is blended with shadows, which suggest a mysterious qualification of it by an element of humiliation and suffering. It might well be that, left to ourselves to puzzle out the meaning of this, we might be at a loss to fit the apparently discordant features harmoniously together, or to make out what was intended by the

writers, or at least was involved in their language. But let us once get hold of the idea, it matters not from whence, that these passages derive their sombre shadows from the obscurely-hinted presage of the rejection of the Messiah by His own nation, and of His subjection to shame and death in the accomplishment of His work, and they then fall into harmony and become luminous. That idea unlocks the perplexity, fits together the parts of the puzzle, lights up the darkness, and thus approves itself as the true idea of the passages, the idea which we shall be justified in attributing to them, and drawing out of them for our own use.

With this reminder to ourselves of what we are doing, let us now look for similar intimations in the prophetic books. Those which are available for our purpose are not numerous.

One of the first to occur to our minds will probably be the celebrated prophecy of the seventy weeks in Daniel,⁷ which seems to speak so explicitly of "Messiah" being "cut off." Here, however, it must be confessed that we are on somewhat doubtful ground. The very explicitness of the prediction marks it off so widely from all the rest of Hebrew Messianic prophecy, as to suggest a suspicion that, after

⁷ Dan. ix. 24, 27.

all, it may not, in its original sense, refer directly to the Christ of God.⁸ And when we inquire further, we discover that so many difficulties have been raised around the Messianic interpretation, by critical discussions about the probable date and primary meaning of the prediction, as to warn the modern defender of Christianity against resting his case upon it with the confidence of his predecessors in the argument.⁹ Only this, I think, may be fairly suggested, that even if the primary intention of the passage be limited to the events which occurred in the time of the Maccabees, as many expositors contend, and its object were to animate the Jews to a valiant resistance of their enemies in the deadly struggle for their independence; still, even on this view it is by no means improbable that the language was coloured by a later and grander hope when it spoke of a time determined "to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and

⁸ The expression is indefinite: "An anointed one shall be cut off." It should be remembered that the term is not confined to the object of the great Messianic hope. The famous Persian conqueror Koresh, or Cyrus, is expressly called Jehovah's Messiah, in Isaiah xlv. 1. It is used of the high priests, Lev. iv. 3, 5, 16; the kings, 1 Sam. xxiv. 6, Lam. iv. 20; and even the people of Israel, Psalm cv. 15.

⁹ See *Speaker's Commentary*, Introd. to Dan., sec. iii.

to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness.”¹

Next in explicitness of phraseology come two passages from the book of Zechariah. The last three chapters contain a very striking prophecy of Israel's future, in which the final triumph and salvation are depicted as being preceded by a season of penitence for the sins that had provoked the divine judgment. In the midst of the description this word is represented as issuing from the mouth of the Eternal: “I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications, and they shall look upon me (or him)² whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born.”³ And presently afterwards the same voice invokes the sword to arise and smite the man who is Jehovah's fellow, and who may be reasonably identified with him whom the people just before are charged with having pierced. “Awake, O sword, against My shepherd, and against the man that is My fellow, saith the Lord of Hosts; smite the

¹ Dan. ix. 24.

² See *Speaker's Commentary*.

³ Zech. xii. 10.

shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered ; and I will turn Mine hand upon the little ones.”⁴ Then follows a spirited description of the great “day of the Lord” with its conflict and victory, out of which shall emerge the universal kingdom of righteousness, when “the Lord shall be king over all the earth, and there shall be one Lord, and His name one.”⁵

Now it is plain that the whole passage is Messianic ; that is, it treats of the great crisis of Israel’s fate, when the expected deliverer should arise and conquer. But when in the midst of it we meet with a mysterious personage, one who is in a peculiar relation to God, being called His “fellow,” and also to the people, as being God’s “shepherd” over them ; and we hear God Himself calling the sword to awake and smite this person, and learn also that he had been “pierced” by the people in their sin, it seems difficult to come to any other conclusion than that the Messiah’s path to His triumph was expected to lie through rejection and death. No doubt the whole representation is obscure and mysterious, as we saw reason to expect would be the case with this sombre element of prophecy. But there it is, for us to make what we can out of it ; and

⁴ Zech. xiii. 7.

⁵ Zech. xiv. 9.

it certainly unites the Messianic forecast with images of humiliation and suffering. Only let us weigh the words, "Him whom they have pierced;" "Awake, O sword, against My shepherd, and against the man that is My fellow." Can we wonder, that in terms so suggestive and impressive, an allusion to the Messiah's Passion should have been believed to be veiled and wrapped up? Or can we deny the interpretation to be reasonable and appropriate?

I pass over remoter and vaguer expressions which might be gleaned out of the prophetic writings, but are scarcely likely to be admitted as evidence by the sceptic; and hasten on to the prophecy, or series of prophecies, concerning the Servant of the Lord, which fill a large space in the latter part of our book of Isaiah.⁶ It is here that the darker element of the Messianic forecast attains its fullest development. By their mingled grandeur and pathos, and their undeniable faithfulness to the Christian idea, these wonderful prophecies have attracted the world's liveliest attention for more than eighteen centuries. That mysterious Person on whose conflict and triumph the dispensations of God seem to depend for their unfolding and final

⁶ Isa. xlii., xlix.—liii., lxi.

issue; chosen and upheld by the Eternal, and set for a restorer of Israel and a light to the Gentiles, yet despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; delighted in by God, and hid in the shadow of His almighty hand, yet bruised by Him, and put to grief, and numbered among the transgressors; himself meek and spotless, yet bearing the sin of many, and stricken for the transgressions of the people; marred in visage more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men, yet destined to be exalted and extolled, and be very high, to prolong his days, and see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied:—Who, it may well be asked with the liveliest amazement, who can this be of whom the prophet speaks such things?

It is true that touches here and there in the portrait might suggest some contemporary subject. By some we might be reminded of Jeremiah, the prophet of tears, who, in the midst of dangers and storms of reproach, vainly sought to avert the ruin of his country. In others we might discern the writer himself, supposed by some learned critics to have been a “later Isaiah,” or “great unnamed” prophet of the captivity, apparently described in some ancient catalogues of the prophets as Abdadonai,

the "servant of the Lord."⁷ By others, again, we might be led to think of a personification of the nation, as God's witness to the world, oppressed and spoiled by the heathen, yet reserved for a glorious future.

But take the whole delineation together, and it seems impossible to rest in any of these solutions, as if they adequately satisfied the terms of the enigma. The mind, I speak at least for myself, is irresistibly led on past them, to search for some wider, completer fulfilment.⁸ Each lesser application may possibly be true as far as it goes; each may, for aught we can tell, have in turn coloured, and left its trace in, the texture of the marvellous strain. But surely the whole soars to a loftier sphere, and demands grander events for its full and final signification. In a word, nothing short of the great Messianic expectation seems at all adequate to satisfy it; and of this it weaves together the brighter and the more sombre elements, the rejection and suffering with the exaltation and

⁷ See Dean Stanley's *Lectures on the Jewish Church*, vol. iii. page 18.

⁸ As an illustration of this the following comment on the chapter may be quoted from Dr. Davidson's *Introduction to the Old Testament*, the general tone of which is adverse to the predictive element in Hebrew prophecy. "As the preludings of a prophetic mind, breathed into by the Spirit of

the glory, with a precision and a fulness that could scarcely have been surpassed, if, instead of being a mysterious fore-shadowing, it had been an actual history, of the "cross and passion, the precious death and burial, the glorious resurrection and ascension," attributed by Christians to the Redeemer in whom they believe.

We have now completed our inquiry into the Old Testament Scriptures, to ascertain whether they exhibit, however dim and veiled, a forecast of suffering as a part of the Messianic idea. We certainly think that we detect it there, and that without it many passages are inexplicable. But it is urged by sceptics that we are deluding ourselves; that under the influence of Christian prepossessions we read back into the prophecies a meaning which does not really belong to them, and which would never have occurred to any one who studied the ancient Scriptures without bias or prejudice. No doubt, this disparagement of the Christian interpretation finds sup-

God, it reaches into the future of God's kingdom with wondrous grasp and distinctness, so that the very Messiah is revealed in terms of whose far-reaching import the seer is unconscious. His soaring hopes, which the God-consciousness within him could not *consciously* shape into a distinct image of the Messiah, were so overruled as to find their only perfect fulfilment in One.—the glorious Head of the

port in the facility with which the mind persuades itself, that it has actually discovered what it has eagerly sought for, and earnestly wished to find. Let the reader, therefore, kindly consider what may be said in reply.

It has been already remarked that, long before the commencement of the Christian era, the ancient Scriptures led the Jewish nation to expect a personal and glorious Messiah, and that the stamp of historical fact is thus set on the justness of the Messianic interpretation. Now, it was not to be expected that the contrasted idea of a rejected and suffering Messiah, assuming it to be really inherent in the prophecies, would be as readily seized upon, or as thoroughly incorporated in the national expectation. From its peculiar and delicate nature, this trait in the portraiture of Him that was to come would, as I have had occasion already to point out, be likely to be treated with much more reserve by the prophets in general, and it would certainly encounter the utmost dislike and resistance in the minds of the people. That they should prove so recreant from their high calling as to reject God's noblest gift, and should thus quench all their glorious hopes in apostasy and irremediable ruin, must have been the most odious and intolerable thought that could

be suggested to a Jew. It was sure to be struggled against to the utmost, and prevented if possible from obtaining any lodgment in the national mind.

Yet it is historically certain, that this sombre and disappointing feature of the Messianic idea did, in some measure, assert its right to be considered as a part of the prophetic teaching. From the Jewish Targums, or paraphrases, which, if later in their present form than the rise of Christianity, at least record the earlier traditions of Rabbinical interpretation, we learn that the conception of a suffering Messiah forced itself on the reluctant attention of the scribes and authorized expositors of Scripture, excited grave perplexity in their minds, and gave birth to the curious theory of two Messiahs, invested with different functions. To the one, whom they named the son of Joseph or of Ephraim, they assigned the humiliation and death; to the other, the son of David, the triumph and glory. Other evidence to the same effect may be found in the Talmud, and in the primitive prayers of the synagogue; in closing a review of which Hengstenberg says, "The result we have obtained is this: the doctrine of a suffering and atoning Messiah existed among the Jews from the very earliest times, and was not

the result of Christian influence, but was derived from the Old Testament.”⁹ Thus this part also of the Messianic interpretation has the seal of historical fact to its correctness.

Another proof of its being well founded is furnished by the immediate and enthusiastic reception, which it manifestly found among the primitive believers in Christ.

It is evident from the earliest Christian writings that are extant, whether within or outside the sacred Canon, that in the controversy with the Jews in behalf of Christianity, the fulfilment of prophecy in the suffering and death of Jesus was a topic most continually urged, and confidently relied upon, as a proof of His being the expected Messiah. The New Testament abounds in appeals to the prophets, and shows by the whole tone and tenour of its language how thoroughly the early Christian mind was possessed by the conviction, that the Messiah’s sufferings were unmistakably fore-

⁹ *Christology*, vol. iv. p. 363 in Clarke’s series. See also *Pearson on the Creed*, art. iv., and *Speaker’s Commentary* on Isaiah liii., note A. Also Dean Payne Smith’s remark in his *Sixth Bampton Lecture on Prophecy*: “Any one acquainted with the Targums and with Jewish expositors is well aware what an utter puzzle this portraiture was and is to them, and how it contradicted and still contradicts all their deepest feelings and their patriotic hopes.”

shadowed in the Old Testament. It will be enough to point to a few of the assertions, than which nothing could be broader or more uncompromising. For the purpose of evidence we need not assume anything about their authorship or date; all we require is their existence in the text.

Thus into the mouth of Jesus Himself these sayings are put.

“Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man shall be accomplished. For He shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked and spitefully entreated, and spitted on; and they shall scourge Him, and put Him to death; and the third day He shall rise again.”¹

“O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken; ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory?”²

“These are the things which I spake unto you while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets and in the Psalms concerning Me. . . . Thus it is written, and thus

¹ Luke xviii. 31—33.

² Luke xxiv. 25, 26.

it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day.”³

St. Peter is represented as saying to the people in one of his earliest speeches:—

“Ye denied the holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; and killed the Prince of Life. . . . And, now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers. But these things, which God before had showed by the mouth of all His prophets, that Christ should suffer, He hath so fulfilled.”⁴

To the same effect he writes in his first Epistle:—

“Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you; searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.”⁵

Similar statements are repeatedly ascribed to Saint Paul, among which are the following:—

“They that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew Him not, nor yet the

³ Luke xxiv. 44, 46, 47.

⁴ Acts iii. 14, 15, 17, 18.

⁵ 1 Pet. i. 10, 11.

voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning Him.”⁶

“Out of the Scriptures opening and alleging that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus whom I preach unto you is Christ.”⁷

“Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come; that Christ should suffer, and that He should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles.”⁸

Once more, in the Revelation, where Jesus is said to describe Himself as “I am He that liveth, and was dead, and, behold, I am alive for evermore,”⁹ and is represented under the emblem of “a Lamb as it had been slain,”¹ it is broadly asserted that “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”²

Such comprehensive and unqualified passages as these, to say nothing of the very numerous instances of the specific application of the

⁶ Acts xiii. 27.

⁸ Acts xxvi. 22, 23.

¹ Rev. v. 6.

⁷ Acts xvii. 2, 3.

⁹ Rev. i. 18.

² Rev. xix. 10.

prophecies to events in our Lord's humiliation and passion, are amply sufficient to show that from the first the Christian mind was thoroughly impregnated with the idea, that suffering and death were essential parts of the Messianic forecast, as it was exhibited in the Hebrew Scriptures. Nor need the reader's patience be exercised by quotations from the Fathers in illustration of this fact. The topic was notoriously one of those most universally dwelt upon, in every defence of Christian doctrine, especially against the Jews, as in Justin Martyr's Dialogue with Trypho, to which reference has already been made.³

Now, I beg the reader to observe the bearing on the argument of this striking fact.

It is certain that, at the time in which Christianity arose, the expectation of a triumphant and glorious Messiah had gained almost exclusive possession of the Jewish mind. The contrasted idea lay in the background, discountenanced, and as far as possible barred out of the popular apprehension. And it was in the bosom of the Jewish people that those who became the earliest disciples of Jesus had been nurtured. There they had been fed on the hope of a coming glory for Israel, and been

³ Page 20.

taught to look with eager eyes for the King who should come in the name of the Lord,⁴ to restore the kingdom unto Israel,⁵ and to reign over the house of Jacob for ever.⁶ Nourished on these hopes of temporal splendour and greatness, it must have run counter to all their prepossessions and feelings, when they were required to surrender their bright vision for a Messiah who had been nailed to the accursed cross, and for a spiritual kingdom in which Israel as a nation should have no share. I do not see how it would have been possible for them, not barely to acquiesce in this entire change in the character of their hope, but to accept it with enthusiasm and to glory in it, as they manifestly did, had not an irresistible conviction from the first taken hold of their minds, that this was the real meaning of their prophets, and that the Scriptures, properly understood, foretold a Messiah who should be "made perfect through sufferings."⁷

Thus, both in the interpretations of the Jewish expositors before the Christian era, and in the ardent convictions and faith of the first converts to Christ from Judaism, we find a very important,—may I not say decisive?—confir-

⁴ Luke xix. 38; John xii. 13.

⁵ Acts i. 6.

⁶ Luke i. 33.

⁷ Heb. ii. 10.

mation of the presence in the ancient Scriptures of the third element of the Messianic idea—the element of rejection, shame, and death. It certainly was no Christian gloss, invented to support Christianity and recommend it to the Gentile world. Before Christianity arose, the Jewish rabbis detected this element in their sacred books, and were perplexed with the mystery that seemed to shroud it. Afterwards, when, in their battle with Christianity, it was of the utmost consequence to them to get rid of it, if by any means they could, they were constrained to confess it, and driven to strange shifts to weaken its force. Moreover, as we have just seen, the conduct and convictions of the early converts from Judaism afford a striking, though indirect confirmation of the Christian assumption, that the prophecies when rightly interpreted really point to a suffering Messiah. For it was not with these as with the converts from heathenism. The latter had no prepossessions to overcome, no life-long training to reverse; in their minds the Messianic idea found a virgin soil in which to root itself. But with the others, as I would again urge, it was very different. Bred up in the popular expectation of a temporal Deliverer, and taught to understand the prophecies in

that sense alone, their adoption of Christianity involved an abandonment of their dearest hope, and a complete change of front in their view of the prophecies on which that hope was founded. Yet, as we have seen, they made that change with enthusiasm, and surrendered that hope without reserve or reluctance. The idea that a suffering Messiah was foretold by the prophets seized on their minds with the irresistible force of a truth that was self-evident, and needed only to be propounded to overcome every adverse prepossession, and win unhesitating acceptance. Far from being ashamed of the cross, or keeping it in the background, as it might have seemed natural for them to do, these converts from Judaism took their stand openly upon it, in their conflict with their unbelieving countrymen, insisted that a crucified Messiah was beyond all question the only true fulfilment of the prophecies, and proclaimed "Jesus Christ and Him crucified" as "the power of God and the wisdom of God."^s And as I cannot deem it probable that this fervid acceptance of and glorying in the Cross had no better foundation than a false meaning foisted into the familiar prophecies by the propagandists of Christianity, I appeal to it as

^s 1 Cor. i. 24.

strong confirmatory evidence that the Christian interpretation is the true one.

With these historical corroborations before us of the view of Hebrew prophecy which traces in it a forecast of a suffering Messiah, I think we may reasonably complain of the perverseness of those sceptical critics, who persist in regarding the idea of a suffering Messiah as being nothing more substantial than a fiction invented by the advocates of Christianity, and having no real standing ground in the text of the Old Testament. Such a line of argument, or rather assertion, appears to betray a resolve to fly in the face of the plainest facts, sooner than admit that "God hath made that same Jesus who was crucified both Lord and Christ."⁹

The part of our argument which has been pursued in this and the preceding section may now be summed up.

We have found the Scriptures of the Old Testament to be pervaded by a great Messianic forecast, in which these three elements are combined.

First, a conviction of the ultimate triumph of God's cause, and the establishment of His kingdom everywhere and for ever.

Secondly, a prescience of the accomplishment

⁹ Acts ii. 36.

of this grand outcome of the world's struggles by the agency of a personal Champion or Deliverer, raised up by God out of the bosom of Israel, and destined to be victorious over all the enemies of righteousness, and to reign in glory, as God's anointed, world without end.

Thirdly, a mysterious foreshadowing of humiliation, rejection, and suffering, to be undergone by this Deliverer, before He should achieve His triumph, and enter on His glory.

By the forecast, of which these elements are the component parts, the great body of Hebrew prophecy appears to be penetrated and leavened.

SECTION VII.

THE FORECAST OF A SPIRITUAL RELIGION.

I PASS on now to the third and last of the great prophetic forecasts. This may be described as a practical anticipation of and preparation for a Spiritual Religion, instead of a religion of rigid precept and ceremonial observance.

In the bosom of Judaism, as more or less in all religious systems, there were two forces in conflict. "The flesh lusted against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh."¹ The one tended to bind down the religion to local forms and external worship; the other to elevate it, and make it a "worship in spirit and in truth." The former found its home and nutriment among the ceremonies and sacrifices of the Levitical law, the hereditary priesthood, and the local worship of the sanctuary; the other had for its organ the prophetic order.

Now if from the earliest times, and thenceforward invariably throughout all the vicissitudes of the national fortunes, the influence of the prophets was thrown on the side of

¹ Gal. v. 17.

spirituality and against formalism, and was evermore directed to unfold and stimulate the higher elements of the religious life; if the constant tendency of their teaching was to treat as subordinate the legal limitations of time and place and ritual, to raise the minds of the people to purer and loftier conceptions of God, and to inculcate the supremacy of moral and spiritual affections over all material acts and bodily worship and service; then from the very nature of the case we are justified in seeing in this commanding feature of their utterances a prognostic of the dispensation to come. For Judaism was essentially a religion that looked onwards, and contained the germ of progress, and the promise of better things. Its prophets, bending their ardent gaze on the future, caught a glimpse, as we have already seen, of the expansion of Judaism into a universal religion. Towards that future development they were working, so to speak, in their endeavours to emancipate religion from the bonds of the flesh; the spirit of the coming world-wide kingdom of heaven, however far distant its realization might be, was already stirring within them; of the principles which would then be triumphant they were the heralds and forerunners.

Thus the work of the prophets, while it was ever giving an onward impulse to the contemporary Judaism, contained within itself a sign and foreshadowing of the future. To an intelligent eye, bent on divining from it the purpose of God, its very texture and colour exhibited a presentiment of the spirituality that should characterize the wider dispensation to follow.

To bring out clearly the presence of this forecast in the ancient Scriptures, we must again have recourse to quotation, selecting some chief passages as illustrations, rather than exhibiting the evidence at full length.

It is remarkable that the keynote of the expectation of a spiritual religion was given at the outset, in the story of the great Father of Israel. "Abraham believed in the Lord, and He counted it to him for righteousness."² No outward act, no ritual observance or costly sacrifice, lay at the root of the patriarch's acceptance and justification; God looked at the heart, and set His seal on the inward affection of filial trust. On that foundation a whole religion of the spirit might be built. And grievously as the nation often fell below that high level in after times, the pre-eminence of the moral and spiritual over the ceremonial and

² Gen. xv. 6.

material, thus asserted in the earliest dawn of its life, was never left wholly without witness.

In proceeding now to draw out the evidence by which the forecast of a spiritual religion is established, it will be convenient to arrange it under several distinct heads, making it our aim to observe how, under the influence of the prophetic teaching, the spiritual doctrines which prepared the way for Christianity gradually emerged out of those grosser conceptions that encrusted the early faith of Israel.

We begin with the idea of God.

Nothing so debases a religion as a low, limited, unworthy conception of the supreme Object of worship. Whatever represents God as tied down to country or race, or confines His presence to local sanctuaries, or limits human access to Him by artificial restrictions, or makes His worship to centre in external acts, or clothes Him with the coarser human passions, reacts injuriously on the worshippers, and rivets on their minds the debasing fetters of superstition. It is on the very opposite conception that Christianity is founded. It rests on the sublime truth taught by the well of Sychar: "The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship Him.

God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.”³ That, indeed, was a strain beyond the reach of even the greatest of the prophets of Israel. But the point to be noticed is, that they were always working towards it, clearing the way for it, mingling not indistinct foreshadowings of it with their teaching.

Watching the gradual unfolding of the idea of God in the prophetic literature, we find it, along the main lines of its development, dropping by degrees the limitations and grosser conceptions of the earlier times, and soaring towards a grander and more spiritual ideal.

God ceases to be imagined as the peculiar or local God of Israel, which seems to have been a very prevalent notion concerning Him in the rude, disorderly days of the Judges;⁴ and is proclaimed as the only God, “beside whom there is none else,”⁵ the “Jehovah, who is the

³ John iv. 23, 24.

⁴ “The relation of God to the Israelites as their special sovereign, of the Israelites to God as His chosen and peculiar people, led almost of necessity to the vulgar notion (and the vulgar notion spread very widely), that Jehovah was the national God; a greater God indeed than the gods of the neighbouring and hostile nations, but still self-limited, as it were, to the tutelar deity of the sons of Abraham.”—Milman’s *Hist. of Jews*, vol. i. p. 438, note.

⁵ Isa. xlv. 6, 8.

most High over all the earth,"⁶ the "Lord of the whole world and of all that dwell therein."⁷ All that is in heaven and earth is His, and He reigns over all.⁸ He inhabits eternity,⁹ and is from everlasting to everlasting.¹ He fills heaven and earth.² Heaven is His throne, and earth is His footstool.³ His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.⁴

Again, His knowledge and His righteous judgment are extended from the outer domain of the visible life and conduct to the secrecies of the human spirit. He tries the hearts and the reins.⁵ He searches all hearts, and understands all the imaginations of the thoughts.⁶ He desires truth in the inward parts.⁷ He bestows a new heart and a new spirit,⁸ and dwells with him that is of an humble and contrite spirit.⁹

Concurrently with this extension of the scope of the divine knowledge and judgment, to embrace and scrutinize the inner life of the spirit, and as the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews strikingly says, to "pierce even to the

⁶ Ps. lxxxiii. 18.⁷ Ps. xxiv. 1.⁸ 1 Chron. xxix. 11, 12.⁹ Isa. lvii. 15.¹ Ps. xc. 2.² Jer. xxiii. 24.³ Isa. lxvi. 1.⁴ Dan. vii. 27.⁵ Ps. vii. 9; Jer. xi. 20.⁶ 1 Chron. xxviii. 9.⁷ Ps. li. 6.⁸ Ezek. xviii. 31.⁹ Isa. lvii. 15.

dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and to be a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart,"¹ the moral attributes of God are brought out into increasing prominence, and invested with a sacred supremacy. He is named emphatically "the Holy One." He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity.² He is righteous in all His ways, and holy in all His works.³ He loves judgment, and hates robbery for burnt offering.⁴ He is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.⁵ His counsels are faithfulness and truth.⁶ His judgments are true and righteous altogether.⁷ All the lower and coarser similitudes by which God had been imaged forth, to bring down the conception of His being to the level of the ignorant and sensuous, are disused by degrees, or confessed to be inadequate; and He stands revealed as the infinite and all-perfect Being, who transcends all resemblance and comparison. "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts."⁸

¹ Heb. iv. 12.² Hab. i. 13.³ Ps. cxlv. 17.⁴ Isa. lxi. 8.⁵ Ps. ciii. 8.⁶ Isa. xxv. 1.⁷ Ps. xix. 9.⁸ Isa. lv. 8, 9.

Thus, through the prophetic teaching, the idea of God was gradually enlarged and elevated, and the way was prepared for the full revelation in Jesus Christ of the universal "Father, of whom are all things and we in Him."⁹

Let us next observe how the idea of a spiritual worship, as distinguished from one of outward acts, grew up under the influence of the prophets.

Considering the sanctions which bound the sacrificial system of worship on the conscience of the people, it is startling to hear how boldly and unmeasuredly the prophets pour scorn on it, and vilify it as worse than worthless, when regarded as a substitute for the worship of a pure heart, and the righteousness of an obedient life. The key-note of this high, indignant strain is set in the words ascribed to Samuel, the illustrious founder of the prophetic school. Confronting the disobedient king, he demands with a burning indignation, "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams."¹

In a similar strain God Himself is represented by one of the Psalmists as addressing the na-

⁹ 1 Cor. viii. 6.

¹ 1 Sam. xv. 22.

tion, and reproving it for imagining that heaping His altar with victims would make up for disregard of His righteous law. "Hear, O My people, and I will speak; O Israel, and I will testify against thee; I am God, even thy God. I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices or thy burnt offerings, to have been continually before Me. I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he-goats out of thy folds. For every beast of the forest is Mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. . . . Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? Offer unto God thanksgiving, and pay thy vows unto the most High: and call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me. . . . Whoso offereth praise glorifieth Me, and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I show the salvation of God."²

In another psalm, one of the distinctly Messianic ones, the same idea is repeated. "Sacrifice and offering Thou didst not desire; . . . burnt offering and sin offering hast Thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come; in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do Thy will, O my God; yea, Thy law is within my heart."³

And in yet another, the solemn "Miserere"

² Ps. l. 7--10, 13, 14, 23.

³ Ps. xl. 6--8.

of Christendom, it is shown in the exquisite strain of the penitent mourner how much more acceptable to God is godly sorrow for sin than all the sacrifices of the material altar. "Thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it; Thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise."⁴

By the mouth of Hosea also God enforces the same lesson, of the superiority of the moral over the ceremonial: "I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings."⁵

Still more energetic are the words in which Isaiah expresses the divine abhorrence of the sacrifices ordained by God Himself, when brought to His altar by impure hands. In their fiery wrath they seem to wither up and blast the whole temple worship.

"Hear the word of the Lord, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah. To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto Me? saith the Lord; I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats.

⁴ Ps. li. 16, 17.

⁵ Hosea vi. 6.

When ye come to appear before Me, who hath required this at your hands to tread My courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto Me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts My soul hateth; they are a trouble unto Me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide Mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear; your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before Mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed; judge the fatherless; plead for the widow.”⁶

At the close also of the same great Book of prophecy the divine rejection of merely ceremonial sacrifices is repeated, and this time with a scorn which, if less vehement, is even more concentrated and bitter. “He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb as if he cut off a dog’s neck; he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine’s blood; he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol. Yea, they have chosen their own

⁶ Isa. i. 10–17.

ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations.”⁷

By Amos a rebuke not less wrathful is launched against the wicked, who think to conciliate God with offerings, while they tread down the poor, and “turn judgment to worm-wood.” “I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer Me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them; neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from Me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols. But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.”⁸

And to quote one more illustration of the same sentiment, we have the following exquisitely beautiful strain in the book of Micah:—

“Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin

⁷ Isa. lxvi. 3.

⁸ Amos v. 21—24.

of my soul? He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"⁹

Closely connected with the depreciation by the prophets of sacrificial expiations is the efficacy ascribed by them to Repentance, as some of the passages already cited strikingly show. Others occur in abundance, of which two or three specimens will suffice.

Jonah's narrative is a case in point, and is remarkable as extending the mercy of God to a heathen city. Throwing aside the exclusiveness of his nation, the author of this book in a measure anticipates the calling of the Gentiles, and tells us that even in the case of a heathen city, ripe for judgment, the destruction might be averted by crying humbly unto God, and turning from evil ways. Not costly sacrifice was the efficacious atonement, but penitence of heart, and amendment of life. These were acceptable to the most High. "God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil that He had said

⁹ Micah vi. 6—8. The ascription of this noble passage to Balaam, by some of the commentators who follow in the wake of Bishop Butler, seems to me to betray a singular lack of critical insight.

that He would do unto them, and He did it not.”¹

By Joel, a similar lesson is taught to Israel when chastised for sin, in the beautiful words which to this day form one of the most moving calls to penitence. “Rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God; for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness, and repenteth Him of the evil.”²

Not less beautiful and touching is the pleading of Isaiah with the weary and sinful: “Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.”³

To multiply quotations is needless; for all competent critics freely acknowledge “the vast interval between the morality and religion of the Pentateuch, or even of the historical books, and the morality and religion of the prophecies.”⁴ Yet to complete the testimony of Scripture to the emergence of these spiritual doctrines, under the influence of the prophetic

¹ Jonah iii. 10.

² Joel ii. 13.

³ Isa. lv. 6, 7.

⁴ J. S. Mill, *Rep. Govt.*, p. 42.

instruction, from the midst of ruder ideas, it may be well to note these two things.

The first is, the growth of the idea of human Individuality and Responsibility.

That "every one of us shall give account of himself to God"⁵ is a truth which lies at the root of Christianity. But it was slow to find its place in the human consciousness, and in the earlier ages of revelation it remained obscure and undeveloped. The rough justice of those primitive times was savage and indiscriminate, and swept remorselessly over all the connexions of the guilty one, however free they may have been from complicity in the evil. The sins of the fathers were visited on the children.⁶ The family of the criminal was exterminated with him.⁷ Whole tribes were judicially slaughtered, down to the meanest and youngest,—“man and woman, infant and suckling.”⁸ It was only by degrees that the higher view emerged and became paramount, and the sacred individuality of every human being was recognized, and each was understood to stand in his own individual relation to God, and to be responsible for himself. When we have travelled along the successive stages of religi-

⁵ Rom. xiv. 12.

⁶ Exod. xx. 5.

⁷ Josh. vii. 24, 25.

⁸ Deut. vii. 2. Josh. x. 40. 1 Sam. xv. 3.

ous development from the Exodus downwards, and at last reach the divine message to Israel by Ezekiel,⁹ we cannot be insensible to the immense advance which has been made on the early conception. The proverb should no more hold good, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge."¹ Each should answer for himself alone. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die;"² not others because of its sin, nor it because of another's sin. "The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son." Each for himself. The righteous should live by his own righteousness; and on the wicked should be laid his own sin. "When a righteous man turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and dieth in them; for his iniquity that he hath done shall he die. Again, when the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive."³

Here is the germ, already springing up vigorously, of the spiritual truth, that each human soul is in direct, individual relation

⁹ Ezek. xviii.

² Ezek. xviii. 4.

¹ Ezek. xviii. 2.

³ Ezek. xviii. 20, 26, 27.

with the Almighty God;—a truth absolutely necessary to lie at the basis of a univereal religion of the spirit.⁴

The other point to be noticed is this; that just as the prophetic teaching brought into prominence the rights and the responsibility of the individual, so it also exhibited God as dealing graciously with men, not merely in their corporate or national capacity, but individually, taking them one by one into covenant with Himself, and cleansing and renewing their hearts.

Thus when Joel was instructed to foretell the outpouring of the Spirit in the latter days, the word put into his mouth described no merely general or collective blessing, but an individual or personal gift and promise to members of all classes and ranks. "It shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions; and also upon the servants and the handmaids in those days I will pour out my Spirit. . . . And it shall come to pass that

⁴ See this point treated in a masterly manner in Prof. Mozley's *Ruling Ideas in Early Ages*.

whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”⁵

So when by Jeremiah was given the promise of a new covenant, to replace the old national covenant, the same individualizing character pervaded it. The grace was to enter into individual souls for their healing and salvation. “Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. . . . But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel: after those days, saith the Lord, I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts: and will be their God, and they shall be My people.”⁶ Indeed, throughout the promises sent by this prophet of the better days to come, the gracious dealing of God with His people’s hearts was made the prominent feature. Thus we read: “I will give them an heart to know Me, that I am the Lord;”⁷ and again: “I will put My fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from Me.”⁸

⁵ Joel ii. 28, 29, 32.

⁶ Jer. xxxi. 31—33.

⁷ Jer. xxiv. 7.

⁸ Jer. xxxii. 40.

To the same effect was the promise of divine grace communicated through Ezekiel. "I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh; that they may walk in My statutes, and keep Mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be My people, and I will be their God." ⁹

As a further illustration of the topic the glorious passage from Isaiah may be cited; "Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." ¹ To which may be added Malachi's description of God's faithful servants, in an age of indifference and unbelief: "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another; and the Lord hearkened and heard it; and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the Lord, and thought upon His name. And they shall be Mine, saith the Lord, in that day when I make up My jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him." ²

⁹ Ezek. xi. 19, 20.

¹ Isa. lvii. 15.

² Mal. iii. 16, 17.

Let me remind the reader, that the object for which these passages are adduced is to illustrate the progress which was effected under the teaching of the prophets, from the lower idea of the nation being taken collectively into relation to God by an external, national covenant, to the higher conception of a spiritual covenant, under which an inward and vital relation, of divine grace on one side, and holy faith and trust on the other, should be established between the individual soul and its God. It is manifest that this advance towards a higher spirituality was in the direction of Christianity, and laid the foundation on which its doctrines of grace were afterwards built up.

We return now to the main line of our argument, and note one more leading feature of the growth of a spiritual religion under the influence of the prophets. This is to be found in the increased prominence given to Prayer.

Of course it is not meant that there could ever have been a time when prayer did not in some sense and degree enter into the practice of religion, and form part of the worship offered by men to their God. But there is a difference between prayer as part of a local and external ceremonial, of which burnt offerings and material sacrifices and rites formed the chief

features, and prayer as the uplifting of the heart to God in private devotion, the spontaneous outpouring into His ear of the individual's inmost aspirations and desires. It was in the latter direction that, under the prophets, the idea of prayer was moulded. As time rolled on this mode of intercourse between the soul and God was gradually emancipated from formal ceremonies and a local sanctuary, and became the private habit of the devout and faithful. Especially when temple and sacrifice had been abolished, by the carrying away of Judah into Babylon, a great impulse was given to the free development of prayer. Then men began to kneel three times a day in their private chambers, and pray and give thanks before their God.³ Then prayer was set forth before God as incense, and the lifting up of the hands as the evening sacrifice.⁴ Then in the troubled soul grew up the resolve, "As for me I will call upon God, and the Lord shall save me. Evening, and morning, and at noon will I pray, and He shall hear my voice."⁵ By the rivers of Assyria and of Babylon, and in the cities and palaces of the heathen, the exiles prayed to the God of their fathers, learning in the absence of priest and altar and sanctuary

³ Dan. vi. 10.⁴ Ps. cxli. 2.⁵ Ps. lv. 16, 17.

that better language, which prompted by "the spirit of grace and of supplications"⁶ goes straight up to the divine ear.⁷ The habit thus formed showed itself in the long, solemn prayers of Ezra and Nehemiah after the return;⁸ and, as we learn from one of the Psalms, which internal evidence seems clearly to assign to the Maccabæan period, the temple at Jerusalem no longer satisfied the desire of the people to meet before God in the solemn exercises of public worship, and the land became studded with synagogues for the purpose.⁹ It was under the same growing impulse to approach the most High in prayer, that the temple itself now became known as the house of prayer; according to the prophecy, "Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the Lord, to serve Him and to love the name of the Lord, . . . even them will I bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer . . . for My house shall be called an house of prayer for all people."¹

Thus by the gradual cultivation of the spirit and practice of prayer, a sensible preparation

⁶ Zech. xii. 10.

⁷ Ezek. i. 1. Ps. cxxxvii. 1. Dan. ix. 3. Neh. i. 4.

⁸ Ezra ix. 5; Neh. ix.

⁹ Ps. lxxiv. 8.

was made for the time when prayer should come to the forefront as a Christian ordinance and habit, and "men should pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands without wrath and doubting,"² and the precept, "Pray without ceasing,"³ should become a universal law of Christianity.

Looking back, now, over the whole field of the prophetic teaching, I think it must be plain that the idea of religion among the Jewish people was continually rising towards a higher level, and becoming liberated by degrees from debasing limitations and superstitious encumbrances. Amidst many fluctuations and hindrances, we cannot be mistaken in perceiving a steady progress from age to age, a sensible advance towards a universal religion of the spirit. And when we recognize in this development the special work of the prophets, and see that it was one of the chief distinctive features and fruits of their teaching, the question arises to which I wish to ask the reader's particular attention. Can we, having all this progress in view, stop short of believing that the prophetic teaching as a whole contained a real forecast of a future religion, which should be spiritual in its character, as well as catholic in its scope, a religion of the heart for all nations?

² 1 Tim. ii. 8.

³ 1 Thess. v. 17.

Of course it may be replied, and this is the sceptical answer, that the development of moral and spiritual ideas, which we have been tracing in the prophetic literature, was a natural growth, having its sole origin and impulse in the mental constitution of mankind; and that we can only rightly look upon it as furnishing an illustration of the working of that spiritual reason or faculty, with which the Creator has been pleased to endow His children, and not as affording evidence of His speaking through the prophets, and enabling them to exhibit a real inspired forecast of the religion of the future.

But such an account of the matter leaves out of consideration several of its essential features. No doubt, the emergence of a higher spirituality, out of the lower and grosser elements of primitive Judaism, was a real growth out of the soil of humanity, and not a mere revelation supernaturally induced on a dead or stagnant material. But was the growth purely natural and self-evolved, or was it due to a divine stimulus and guidance? That is the real question, on the answer to which depends our right to see a true forecast in this element of the Old Testament Scriptures. And that the latter view is the only adequate one, two considerations seem clearly to point out.

First, this growth of a spiritual religion was the unique product of Judaism. Nothing of the kind was exhibited in other and contemporary religions. No higher spirituality sprang out of their bosom; on the contrary, they sank lower and lower, wore themselves out, and perished. Here alone was steady advance, continual ascent, onward struggle maintained against all hindrances, and crowned at last with triumph. Judaism ripened into Christianity: "First the blade, then the ear; after that, the full corn in the ear."⁴

And *secondly*, the continuous advance in spirituality was accompanied, as we have seen, by a clear forecast of a universal religion to be established in the latter days.⁵ The prophets were working towards a definite future. Their own limited dispensation was avowedly preparatory to a wider one; their own imperfect national covenant was to be laid aside for one of a higher and more beneficent character. If their feet stood on the soil of Judaism, their gaze was turned forwards to Christianity, as yet hidden in the counsels of God.

Now these two features in combination give to the prophetic teaching a significance, which neither by itself alone could impart to it. The

⁴ Mark iv. 28.

⁵ See Section IV.

prophets busied themselves in widening and elevating the religion of their own day, and imparting to it a purer, freer scope; and at the same time they looked forward to and predicted its extension beyond the narrow bounds of Israel, to triumph over all idolatries, and embrace all nations. Is it reasonable, I ask, to separate these two things, and persuade ourselves that no intimation of the religion of the future was afforded by the increase of spirituality in the religion of the present? Are we not justified in seeing in the character, which the prophets were stamping on a progressive Judaism, a true forecast of the nature of that universal religion, into which Judaism was to expand and be absorbed?

SECTION VIII.

THE FULFILMENT OF THE FORECASTS IN
CHRISTIANITY.

THE argument which we are constructing falls naturally into two chief parts; and it is from the correspondence between these that its force is derived. In the first we have to establish the existence of certain prophetical intimations or announcements; in the second to show that events have fulfilled them. The former task we have now accomplished, and I trust the reader has been convinced that the ancient Scriptures of the Old Testament really contain, and are largely pervaded and coloured by, three great forecasts of the future, which constitute their distinct prophetical element. This characteristic of them being established, it remains for us to show that these forecasts have been historically fulfilled; and not only fulfilled as a matter of fact, but fulfilled in such a manner as to indicate the agency of the Divine prescience, wisdom, and power.

For it is not every kind of fulfilment which

suffices for proof of genuine foreknowledge of the future. Forecasts, when classed with reference to their verification by subsequent events, may be divided into three kinds. *First*, those which must be set aside as absolutely false, being followed by no fulfilment at all. *Secondly*, those which, though they are followed by events that correspond to them and simulate a fulfilment of them, fail to establish a real prescience; because the apparent fulfilment in these cases might have been anticipated by human sagacity, or may have been brought about intentionally by human contrivance in order to correspond to the prediction, or have grown in the natural course of things out of the prediction itself. These may be called *illusive*. *Thirdly*, those which are followed by a fulfilment such as no human sagacity could have anticipated, nor human ingenuity have devised, nor the forecast itself have occasioned. These form a distinct class in which alone the evidence of a genuine prescience is to be found; and it is plain that for the purpose of our argument it is forecasts of this last kind only that are available.

To put these distinctions in a clear light, I once more beg the reader's indulgence for a homely illustration.

Suppose that, from his early years, a man is possessed by a persistent presentiment, that after he has reached the middle of life a new sphere of very wide and responsible action will suddenly open before him, requiring in its occupant large stores of knowledge and special aptitudes and habits; and that under the influence and pressure of this anticipation, constantly present to his mind, he steadily shapes his life, during many laborious years, so as to prepare himself to enter on the high vocation whenever the call shall come.

Now it may turn out that the call never does come. The opportunity to which he has so long been looking forward may be altogether denied him; the labour of preparation may be entirely thrown away; and thus the presentiment which shaped the man's life would be proved to have been unfounded. In that case the forecast would have been simply a false one.

Or it may happen that the very fact of his having sedulously qualified himself for high and important office leads to his being selected for and appointed to some such well-known office, which happens to fall vacant or to want an occupant at the time at which he is ready for it; and thus his early presentiment brings

about its own fulfilment by a merely natural sequence of events. In this case the forecast may be called illusive; it is fulfilled, but it fulfils itself; the case furnishes an instance of sagacious prudence, or of the power of the human will to work out its purpose by ordinary means; but there is no real prescience of the future in it.

But a third issue may be supposed. The presentiment might be realized in a way which it was impossible for any one to have anticipated; by some extraordinary occurrence out of the range of all probable calculation, and through some strange combination of the most unlikely events, which are as much a surprise to the man himself as to every one else. The call might come like a thunderclap out of a clear sky; and as if by the waving of an enchanter's wand the dream, when apparently furthest from fulfilment, might be suddenly realized. In this case, and only in this, there would be something mysterious and impressive; we should be unable to explain it by any known laws of human knowledge or thought; the forecast so firmly rooted in the mind for many years before, and so unaccountably proved true at last, would assume in our eyes the character of a real prophetic glance into the

future, a genuine prescience of things to come.

What I wish, by means of this illustration, to make plain is this: that when we base an argument, for the reality of a Divine intervention or inspiration, on the great forecasts which characterized Hebrew prophecy, it is incumbent on us, not only to prove that those forecasts have been actually realized in historical events, but also to show that the fulfilments of them have been of such a kind, and brought about in such ways, as to exclude the explanation of mere human sagacity in the prophets, or of ingenious contrivance in those who were actors in the supposed fulfilments, or of a tendency in the forecasts to fulfil themselves by a natural evolution of events; and to shut us up to the acknowledgment of an agency above the order of nature—a direct intervention of God Himself.

Such is the task now before us, and to approach it satisfactorily it will be advisable to restate the case, and get it distinctly before our minds.

In the infancy of civilization, ages before Greece and Rome rose as lights in the firmament of humanity, and while the earliest organized communities were slowly struggling

out of primitive barbarism and ignorance, there came into existence a small Eastern tribe which settled down in a land of rocky fastnesses on the edge of the vast Asiatic continent, isolated by deserts on one side, and the sea on the other, from the surrounding nations. Dwelling apart, and jealously preserving their isolation, this people viewed themselves as being specially consecrated to God, and placed under a theocratic government, so as to be in direct connexion with the supernatural and Divine. Under the influence of this position, and this conception of their national constitution and calling, they developed the strongest and most elevated religious instinct that has ever manifested itself in our race, and became marked out from all contemporary peoples by what may be called a unique genius for godliness. By this their institutions and laws were moulded, and their literature formed; and out of this, as its organ, and the means of its sustenance and growth, rose the remarkable line of prophetic teachers, who were from age to age the living witnesses for the consecration of their land and people, the zealous defenders of the theocratic principle, the preachers of righteousness, and the indignant denouncers of idolatry and all other heathenish superstitions and practices.

The part sustained by these teachers in the little commonwealth was of the highest importance, not to their own countrymen alone, but also indirectly to the progress of humanity at large, as contributing to the formation of a pure morality and an enlightened religion; indeed, it stands by itself without any parallel in history. They emerged individually out of the ranks of the people, neither by hereditary succession nor professional education and calling, but spontaneously and irregularly, just as the political or religious circumstances of the country created a need for their voice and ministry. If the sense of the nation's Divine consecration waned and was in danger of expiring, and the people were hankering after foreign alliances and customs; if the purer worship of Jehovah was becoming adulterated by an admixture of heathenish superstitions, or being thrust out by the importation of false gods and idolatrous rites; if religion was being choked under the pressure of formalism and external ceremonial, or the lower classes were groaning under the oppression of the rich and powerful, or perils from without were threatening the independence or very existence of the people of the Divine covenant; then, in every such emergency, the prophet mysteriously started up

as the bearer of a Divine message, and in the name of God denounced or instructed, encouraged or consoled, with more than human authority and power. The effect of this unique ministry was not barely to keep alive, and hand on to posterity, the religion embodied in the written laws and organized institutions of the nation, but also to refine and develope it by infusing wider meanings into existing forms, adding new and more spiritual elements, and continually urging the people along the path of progress to a fuller knowledge and a higher life.

There was, however, another and very peculiar feature of this prophetic teaching. It was not confined to sustaining and stimulating the moral and religious growth of the nation : infused into it, and wrought into its substance, was a mysterious outlook towards the ages to come. The prophets were more than preachers of righteousness, religious patriots, and spiritual advisers ; they professed to raise a corner of the veil that shrouds the future, and give glimpses of the march of providence, and the destinies of Israel and the world. We have their utterances before us, in a literature which, for moral force and noble aspiration, is unrivalled and unapproached by anything else that the ancient

world has bequeathed to us ; and examining these records of their teaching, as we have done succinctly in the preceding sections, we find them pervaded and animated by three leading forecasts of the future development of religion.

Although intensely patriotic, and keenly alive to the peculiar dignity and sacredness of their own people, the Hebrew prophets foretold the establishment of a universal religion, which should embrace all nations, and fill the world at last with righteousness and peace.

Themselves leaders in the battle of the Lord against idolatry, oppression, and wickedness, it was not to their own labours, or the future efforts of their successors, that they looked for the final victory, but to a greater than any of them, a mysterious Personage whom they declared God would raise up as His anointed Servant and chosen King, in whom alone Israel should be exalted and should glory, and the Gentiles should find salvation. Yet with this vision of a conquering Messiah they mingled strains of sadness ; their prescience of His greatness and victorious progress was clouded, contrary to every natural wish and hope, by a dim but not doubtful presentiment of an unbelief and rebelliousness in their own nation, through which He would be subjected to humili-

liation and rejection, ere He became crowned with glory and honour.

Nevertheless, in spite of all hindrances, the triumph shone bright and clear at the far end of the vista down which their gaze travelled. In the Messiah's days it would surely arrive; and they were cheered with the assurance that the work of purifying and elevating religion from gross and degrading conceptions, which they themselves were ceaselessly labouring at under many difficulties, would be crowned with complete success; men should everywhere worship the universal Father with a pure worship, and the knowledge of the Lord should fill the earth as the waters cover the sea.

Such were the great forecasts which were entwined with the teaching of the Hebrew prophets, and largely contributed to impress on it its form and complexion.

Now let us pause here for a moment to imagine what our feelings would be, if after listening to those fervent protests against evil, those burning calls to righteousness, those soaring aspirations towards a purer religion, those bright hopes of the world's regeneration, which lightened the gloom of a thousand years of struggle and progress, we found nothing to follow, no realization no fulfilment, nothing

but the blank of an absolute failure and negation. In other words, let us suppose that with the fall of Israel from their place among the nations, all their magnificent theism, the advance gained by them in moral and spiritual culture, their strong grasp on the unseen and future, had utterly perished and left no mark in the world, and borne no fruit for humanity; that the gross polytheism and superstition of the rest of the nations had closed over the blank left by the disappearance of Judaism, and remained in undisputed possession of mankind. Would not this have been, to every believer in a wise and fatherly God, an inexplicable and confounding conclusion to a dispensation of such manifest power and glorious promise? Would it not have seemed as if God had abandoned the world, and as if righteousness, spirituality, and divine aspiration, were nothing better than idle dreams?

I call attention to this reflexion, because, if it be just, it shows how inevitably theism leads us to see the Divine hand and guidance in that great religious development of which the Hebrew prophets were the chief instruments. If God be at all in the world's history, caring for and directing its course, it would surely be unreasonable to exclude from the sphere of His

supervision and direction the line of noblest growth and richest promise in all that history. Without going at present so far as to infer any distinctly supernatural intervention, by the way of revelation or inspiration, we are irresistibly led by the general conception of God's moral government and paternal care to associate His will and purpose with the whole development of Hebrew prophecy and its world-wide results, and therefore, at least in some appreciable degree, with the great forecasts of the future, which breathed into that body of prophetic teaching a peculiar life and vigour.

But our faith in the Divine government of the world is not put to the confusion which would have come upon it, from the failure and extinction of all that Judaism had struggled for and achieved in the cause of spiritual truth and religious progress. The great prophetic forecasts have certainly been fulfilled. Nothing in all the past is plainer and surer than that. As we accompany them in their unfolding, step by step, watching them grow fuller and completer in their proportions, and firmer in their hold on the Jewish mind, at last the consummation, to which they have for ages been pointing onwards, rises in majestic grandeur on our sight. The Christianity of the New Testament

and of the Holy Catholic Church stands before us ; the realization of all the hopes, the satisfaction of all the aspirations, the fulfilment of all the prophecies ; the glorious City of God, to which all the lines of progress converge ; the kingdom of heaven, in which the Law and the Prophets find their completion.

Here is the universal religion, free from all ties of place, and limitations of nation or tribe. "Go ye, and make disciples of all nations,"¹ was the commission given by the ascending Jesus to the apostles who should bear forth His name to the world ; "preach the Gospel to every creature."² In His name repentance and remission of sins were to be preached among all nations.³ The apostles were to be "His witnesses unto the uttermost part of the earth."⁴ Under Christianity no longer is "any man common or unclean."⁵ The "middle wall of partition" is broken down, and "peace is preached unto them which were afar off, and to them that were nigh."⁶ The mystery is made known, "that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of God's promise in Christ by the Gospel."⁷ Here

¹ Matt. xxviii. 19.² Mark xvi. 25.³ Luke xxiv. 47.⁴ Acts i. 8.⁵ Acts x. 28.⁶ Eph. ii. 14, 17.⁷ Eph. iii. 6.

“there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free ; but Christ is all, and in all.”⁸ Within the courts of the temple of the living God, there is room for “all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues.”⁹

Again, in the doctrine of this world-wide Christianity respecting its Divine Founder, the conflicting elements of the Messianic forecast, that the Anointed Deliverer should be triumphant yet rejected, glorious yet put to humiliation and reproach, are wonderfully harmonized and completely fulfilled. In the “agony and bloody sweat, the cross and passion, the precious death and burial, the glorious resurrection and ascension,”¹ of the Jesus of the Gospels, is realized all that the Hebrew prophets mysteriously mingled together in their portraiture of the elect servant of the Lord, despised and rejected of men, bruised for their iniquities and cut off out of the land of the living, yet destined to be exalted very high, and be for a light to the Gentiles, and salvation unto the ends of the earth. Here is “the Stone which was set at nought of the builders, which is become the head of the corner.”² Here the Anointed of

⁸ Col. iii. 11.

¹ Litany.

⁹ Rev. vii. 9.

² Acts iv. 11.

God, "against whom the kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together,"³ but to whom God gave the heathen for His inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession. Here the Holy One of God, whose "soul was not left in hell, neither did His flesh see corruption."⁴ Here the meek Sufferer, who was betrayed and sold, mocked and scourged and pierced; here the Shepherd who was smitten,⁵ and laid down His life for the sheep;⁶ here "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world."⁷

Yes, in the Jesus proclaimed in Christianity; "crucified through weakness, yet living by the power of God;"⁸ "made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, yet crowned with glory and honour;"⁹ made perfect through sufferings,¹⁰ and "declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead,"¹¹ and "exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour;"¹² "delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification;"¹³ "put to death in the flesh, but quickened in the spirit," and who is now "gone into heaven, and is on

³ Acts iv. 26.⁴ Acts ii. 31; xiii. 35—37.⁵ Matt. xxvi. 31.⁶ John x. 15.⁷ John i. 29.⁸ 2 Cor. xiii. 4.⁹ Heb. ii. 9.¹⁰ Heb. ii. 10.¹¹ Rom. i. 4.¹² Acts v. 31.¹³ Rom. iv. 25.

the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him :”⁵—in this Jesus, the centre and sun of Christianity, the Divine Prophet, Priest, and King of His universal Church, to whom ascend the unceasing adorations of Christendom, “When Thou hadst overcome the sharpness of death, Thou didst open the kingdom of heaven to all believers: Thou sittest at the right hand of God, in the glory of the Father;”—in Him all the scattered fragments of Messianic prophecy fit harmoniously together, and find their appropriate place and their perfect realization.

Once more, Christianity answers to and fulfils the remaining forecast of Hebrew prophecy, that namely which foreshadowed and prepared the way for the introduction of a spiritual religion.

It is to utter a truism to say that the religion which rests on the Person, the Office, and the teaching of Jesus Christ is, above and before all else, a spiritual one, in contrast to an external ceremonial and national one like Judaism, the service of which stood, as the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says, “in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation.”⁶ Christianity is “the ministration

⁵ 1 Pet. iii. 18, 22.

⁶ Heb. ix. 10.

of the Spirit.”⁷ Its worship is “in spirit and in truth.”⁸ Its characteristic life is a life in the spirit.⁹ To be carnal, not spiritual, is the reproach of its unworthy adherents.¹ To become spiritual is the Christian calling.² Here local and national distinctions are of no account, and “there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him;”³ and “God puts no difference between them, purifying their hearts by faith.”⁴ Here ritual and external distinctions are equally disregarded, “for in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh by love.”⁵ Here it is taught, that to burden the conscience with the observance of “days and months and times and years,” instead of walking in the freedom of the sons of God, is to turn back to bondage under “the weak and beggarly elements” of the Past;⁶ and Christians are warned against becoming subject to fleshly ordinances, such as “touch not, taste not, handle not,” because they “are dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world,”⁷ and “the

⁷ 2 Cor. iii. 8.⁸ John iv. 23.⁹ Gal. v. 16.¹ 1 Cor. iii. 1.² 1 Cor. ii. 15. Gal. vi. 1.³ Rom. x. 12.⁴ Acts xv. 9.⁵ Gal. v. 6.⁶ Gal. iv. 9, 10.⁷ Col. ii. 20, 21.

Kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.”⁸ The supreme graces of Christianity, ripened by its holy influences in the hearts of believers, are “faith, hope, and charity, these three, but the greatest of these is charity;”⁹ and the vision of God is reserved for “the pure in heart.”¹

Thus Christianity, by the whole tenour of its doctrine and ethical instruction, lifts its disciples above the region of formalism and rigid precept and austere external morality, to the heights where the free air of the Spirit is breathed, and the sacredness of the individual conscience is recognized, and the purified soul offers itself a willing sacrifice to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Everything that was purest and most spiritual in the teaching of the Hebrew prophets is here gathered up, enlarged, and adorned with fresh lustre; the revelation of the eternal, invisible God reaches its climax of moral beauty and grace; and men are called to take up the noblest standing of which they are capable, as sons in their Father’s house, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ;² assured “that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor

⁸ Rom. xiv. 17.

¹ Matt. v. 8.

⁹ 1 Cor. xiii. 13.

² Rom. viii. 16, 17.

principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate them from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”³

But there is no need to elaborate the proof that in a large and true sense Christianity, as a universal religion of the spirit, centering in its crucified and glorified Head, answers to and realizes those great forecasts which we have traced in Hebrew prophecy. No one who has drunk into the spirit of the prophetic literature on the one hand, and of the Christian development of faith and morality on the other, can fail to perceive the organic connexion that exists between them. The earlier is the manifest germ of the later. New elements indeed are introduced; veils are withdrawn which covered the face of God; things are revealed which prophets and kings under the older dispensation in vain desired to see and hear.⁴ But they are on the same line of progress; and the preacher of Christianity is justified in affirming with St. Paul, that he declares “none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come; that Christ should suffer, and that He should be the first that should rise

³ Rom. viii. 38, 39.

⁴ Luke x. 21.

from the dead, and should show light unto the people and to the Gentiles.”⁵

Having reached this stage of the discussion, the reader's attention must now be invited to some further considerations which are necessary to the completion of our argument. The point at which we have arrived is this, that Christianity really answers to and substantially fulfils the prophetic foreshadowing of the future which was exhibited in Judaism. That is a great undeniable fact, but in this general form it does not necessarily lead to the conclusion at which we are aiming, namely, that Hebrew prophecy was supernaturally inspired, and its fulfilment in Christianity supernaturally brought about and constructed. Recollecting the distinction already made between different kinds of forecasts, when viewed in relation to their eventual fulfilments, it will be seen that the nature of the alleged fulfilment, and the way in which it is related to the prophecy which foretold it, enter materially into the question whether human and natural forces alone may be considered sufficient to account for the correspondence between the two parts of the sequence, or whether the only adequate solution is to be found in the

⁵ Acts xxvi. 22, 23.

direct intervention and operation of God. We must proceed, therefore, to investigate the nature, the quality, of the relation in which the fulfilment in Christianity stood to the forecast in Judaism, in order to ascertain whether the sequence was such as may with probability be attributed to the action of the human faculties, working spontaneously and without Divine assistance and guidance; or whether its peculiar character indicated the presence of a superior agency, and warrants our seeing in it the hand of God.

The answer to the question here raised will turn on two features of the case which now call for special examination; *first*, the elevation of the sphere in which the subject-matter of the debate lies; and *secondly*, the peculiarity of the forms in which the fulfilments of the prophetic forecasts were moulded.

The sphere, within which the great line of facts under consideration is contained, gives them a peculiar significance. We are certainly not dealing with trivial matters, such as might engage the curiosity of dilettanti, or stimulate the researches of antiquaries. Neither is it in the domain of matters of purely secular interest, whether material or intellectual, that our subject lies. If in those lower regions of human

thought and activity some prediction of a future event happened to emerge, and go forward to fulfilment, puzzled as we might be to account for it, we should certainly be justified in feeling an extreme reluctance to concede to it any of the mysteriousness or sanctity of a supernatural phenomenon. That God should mix Himself up with any such matter by a special intervention, or that He should communicate by revelation knowledge which, however useful or interesting, had nothing to do with our spiritual training, could scarcely appear to us otherwise than in the highest degree improbable. Constituted as our minds are, I think it might safely be pronounced to be almost impossible for us to bring ourselves seriously to account for any phenomenon of the kind, by an hypothesis of such enormously disproportioned magnitude, except under the pressure of evidence which amounted to absolute demonstration.

But the subject with which we are dealing, the line of facts which we are passing under review, lies in the very highest region of human thought and emotion; in that sacred region where all the springs of morality and religion take their rise, where the momentous struggle between good and evil is waged, and the eternal

character and destiny of each individual are determined. It certainly is here, if anywhere, that striving, suffering, feeble men have need of God's teaching and assistance; here that they are nearest to the heart of God; here, if anywhere, that God may be expected to meet with them, and speak to them. That in the pursuit of science or art, in the growths of civilization, the subjugation of the physical world, and in all the secularities of human life and endeavour, men should be left to fight their way onwards by means of their own unaided faculties, would be no cause of wonder. But that in the solemn struggle of humanity to find its God, and to rise through the baffling distractions of sense into fellowship with the Divine, no whisper of guidance should be vouchsafed from above, and no sympathetic help be granted, does surely seem to be scarcely consistent with the love of a Father, who has created His children in His own image.

When therefore the theist—for be it remembered it is to him that our argument is addressed,—with his mind possessed by a sense of God's presence in the world, ordering the course of mankind, and working out His Divine purpose, looks back on the illustrious succession of prophets standing forth, one after another,

in the Divine name, and observes them fighting each in his generation, the battle of truth and righteousness, and guiding the struggling advance, not of their own people alone but of the entire world, along the path of moral and spiritual culture; he cannot but feel sure, with the deepest and most impregnable conviction, that it was in the truest sense God's work that was being done by them, and that with them in their arduous labours the Divine sympathy and interest, to speak humanly, must in the highest degree have rested. And now suppose that while watching the progress of that ancient conflict in its historical record, and listening as it were to the burning words in which the prophets declared the name and will of God, and instructed, rebuked, or encouraged the children of men, he seems to discern traces of some power or influence superior to any that nature can boast, some signs of direct inspiration or revelation from above; what will be the feeling likely to arise within him, and to find a justification in his moral judgment? Will it be that this appearance of Divine intervention and teaching must be illusive and misleading; that it is too strange, too much out of harmony with the instincts of humanity, and too foreign to the ascertained course of man's higher life,

to be admissible by his reason ; and that to reduce it within the limits of probability the phenomenon must be dragged down to the natural level, and all its mysteriousness and its savour of the supernatural be explained away and got rid of? Surely, in this high region of man's aspiration after God and God's sympathy and fatherhood towards man, such a feeling as that would be a jarring discord, at variance with all the finer sensibilities of our moral nature ! A thousand times rather would the signs and traces of God's gracious intervention appear to the cultivated spiritual intelligence to fall in harmoniously with the general idea of His fatherly rule over His reasonable creatures, and afford new occasion to "praise the Lord for His goodness and for His wonderful works towards the children of men." ⁶

I urge, then, that the sphere in which Hebrew prophecy moved renders its apparent element of supernaturalism both credible and probable ; and I proceed to point out that this result is supported by the peculiarity of the forms in which the fulfilments of the prophetic forecasts were moulded.

Here I beg the reader to pause with me for

⁶ Ps. cvii. 8.

a moment to recall the general tenour of our argument.

The supernatural and Divine quality of Christianity is the thing in debate. Those against whom we are arguing take up the position, that excellent as the Christian system is on the whole, in its advanced morality and general spirituality of tone, being in fact the purest and best religion as yet formulated, it is nevertheless nothing more than a product of human development, growing out of the play of man's reason, imagination, and other natural faculties, and has nothing supernatural in it, and contains no revelation from God. Well, we join issue with them, and undertake to maintain the supernatural origin and Divine authority of Christianity by a particular argument, which affirms a manifestly supernatural element in the preparation made for Christianity by means of the prophetic teaching recorded in the Old Testament Scriptures. To meet this argument, the rejoinder is made that we are in error in ascribing any supernatural character at all to the prophetic element in Judaism; that the entire religion of Israel was as purely natural and exclusively human as Christianity itself is alleged to be, and that both together form an organic sequence which requires no hypothesis of Divine intervention to explain it.

The stress, then, of the argument at this stage rests on the character which the facts of the case compel us to assign to Hebrew prophecy. Granting it to have received an actual and generally exact fulfilment in Christianity, can it without violence to the facts be reduced to the level of a natural phenomenon? If the rise of Christianity was indeed such an event that the prophets of Israel could have anticipated it by their own sagacity many centuries before it happened, or that the mere influence of their prophecies on the human mind could have occasioned it; in either case the ground for attributing to them a supernatural inspiration would disappear. But if, on the contrary, the way in which Christianity rose out of Judaism, and fitted on to it as the fulfilment of its prophetic foreshadowings, was manifestly beyond the reach of probable conjecture, and incapable of being accounted for by the existence of the prophecies in the sacred literature of the Jews; then we are inevitably thrown back on the explanation which involves a Divine inspiration in the prophets, and a supernatural agency in the events which fulfilled their forecasts of the future.⁷

⁷ "If such a series of characteristics, traced out hundreds of years before the person appeared in whom they were to be exemplified, could have at once originated in human con-
jec-

That the latter is the only reasonable view is what we have now to show.

In endeavouring to make this point good against the sceptic, it must be recollected that we are limited to the use of such materials for the construction of the argument as he will admit to be valid. Neither the historical truth of the Gospel narratives, nor the reality of the Christian miracles, may be taken for granted. Our common ground is the fact that Christianity exists. On both sides it is allowed that under the impulse impressed on the minds of His disciples by Jesus of Nazareth a religion arose out of the bosom of Judaism, which claimed to be the fulfilment of its prophecies and the substance of its shadows, and which was instinct with such vitality and persuasive power that it gathered all civilized nations under its sway. What this religion was and is, and how it was related to the system out of which it sprang, we learn from its authorized and standard documents contained in the New Testament. Placing, then, the two religions, as we know them, side by side for comparison, the question

ture, and received, as they have done, the seal of the Divine providence, then it may be justly affirmed there are no certain landmarks between the human and the Divine."—*Fairbairn on Prophecy*, p. 226.

we have now to resolve is this: Can the manner in which the later system grew out of, and was fitted on to, the earlier be reasonably ascribed to the natural operation of the human faculties, or does it require for its explanation the informing and guiding inspiration of God?

To arrive at an answer let us first see what can be said for the naturalistic scheme; what account can be given of the way in which Judaism was developed into Christianity, on the supposition that there was no power at work but the unassisted energies of human nature.

The explanation must take some such form as the following.

There being, by the supposition on which the explanation proceeds, nothing of revelation or supernatural inspiration in Hebrew prophecy, the expectation of a Messiah which it fostered could have originated in no higher source than the indomitable patriotism and sanguine self-confidence of the Jewish race. Believing in a high destiny for their nation, the prophets must be conceived to have embodied their hopes of its glorious expansion and supremacy in the anticipation of a heaven-sent Deliverer, who should arise out of the line of David their national hero, and lead them to conquest and

dominion. While this expectation was dominating all minds in Israel, there happened to rise up in their midst a young, ardent teacher and reformer, who drew round himself a band of enthusiastic disciples; but whose teaching provoked such antagonism from the ruling class, that he was prematurely cut off by a violent and shameful death. Whether he had ever identified himself with the expected Messiah may be doubtful; but after his death his disciples, if they did not originate, at any rate adopted the idea, and proclaimed him as the Christ for whom the nation was looking.

So far, then, we have on one side an expectation which had grown up in the minds of the people, without any real warrant or foundation; and on the other an attempt on the part of a small band of enthusiasts, undertaken it may be in all sincerity, to make use of the expectation, and turn it into account, by inventing a fulfilment for it in the person of their crucified teacher. But there were obvious difficulties in the way, which it must have required no little boldness and ingenuity to overcome. To surmount these they must be supposed to have put on the prophetic literature of their nation a new interpretation, hitherto unheard of, which assigned to the expected

Messiah a preliminary career of humiliation and rejection; and then to have invented for their deceased Master a resurrection and ascension into heaven, to correspond with the Messiah's predicted exaltation and glory. But it is obvious that even thus the case they had to present to the world was far from being an adequate realization of the popular hope; and as they could not alter the notorious facts, all they could do was to transfer, in their scheme of fulfilment, the scene of Messiah's rule from the land of Palestine to the invisible heavens, and resolve it into a viewless supremacy in the world of spirit; and to substitute for a triumphant and glorious Israel in the home of their fathers a worldwide community of the Gentiles, without temporal rule or visible organization, and bound together only by the tie of a common faith.

Such a singular transformation of the popular Messianic idea, in order to fit it to an obscure teacher whom his nation had disavowed and ignominiously slain, might have been supposed certain to appear so weak and fanciful, not to say revolting to Jewish feeling, as to insure it general rejection and speedy oblivion, a fate which the baseless dreams of enthusiasts, however ingenious, scarcely ever escape. But the strange thing is that it must be believed to

have met with the most astounding success. The curious fable, for on the naturalistic hypothesis it was nothing better, took possession of the world, and rooted itself permanently in the convictions of all civilized nations; and thus the towering structure of Christianity must be held to have arisen out of Judaism, by a process of the most fanciful and baseless human invention, in the success of which nothing but natural causes had any part.

Will not the reader agree with me in esteeming it very marvellous, that any such explanation as this, of the grafting of Christianity on Judaism, should be accepted as adequate by any one who is capable of thinking about the matter? Had the religion preached by the apostles been nothing more than a system of speculative thought, like Gnosticism, for example, begotten of some intellectual eccentricity, to perish without bearing fruit in the next advance of the human mind to new fields of activity, one could conceive of its being constructed by this kind of fanciful invention. But Christianity as we know it, and history has unfolded it; the practical regenerating force of the world; the creator of Christendom; the source of light and hope to countless millions of our race; the mighty instrument

in the hand of the Divine providence, of imparting to mankind the most effective impulse that ever launched them victoriously along the path of the highest and purest culture:—that this should have been the product of an ingenious attempt to palm off on the world a scheme of baseless facts and notions, which should simulate a fulfilment of equally baseless prophecies, is an idea so charged with improbability, a solution of the grand problem so ludicrously insufficient, that to propound it I am bold to pronounce is little less than an insult to reason.

But the naturalistic explanation failing and proving hopelessly inadequate, there is nothing left except the alternative of confessing a hand above man's in the bringing forth of Christianity, and, by consequence, a more than human prescience in the prophecies which were fulfilled in it. And when we examine into the peculiar nature of the correspondence of the new religion with the ancient prophecies, we shall discern, I think, fresh reason to acknowledge the Divine intervention in the shaping of the Christian scheme.

As I have already pointed out, the several great forecasts of prophecy were undoubtedly fulfilled in a general way in Christianity. They

foreshadowed a religion which should be catholic and spiritual, and should centre in a suffering and glorified Messiah. Christianity fulfilled them by being such a religion. But this is only a part of the truth. As we look further into the matter, we discover that the fulfilment transcended the forecasts. It was not limited to realizing them in the letter, according to the narrow Jewish conception of them; it translated them into the loftier, wider region of the spirit, and fitted them with an accomplishment which by its originality and spiritual glory attests a divine Author.

Let us observe how, in each case, the fulfilment overpassed the forecast, while truly corresponding to it.

Christianity fulfils the forecast of a universal religion, free from local and national restrictions. But instead of exhibiting the lower and more earthly form in which the prophets clothed their vision of it, with its head-quarters in Zion, and Israel supreme in rank as a priestly order,⁸ through whose ministration the blessing should flow forth to the Gentiles; the New Testament presents us with a kingdom not of this world,⁹ a kingdom of heaven without earthly centre or visible pomp, a holy Catholic

⁸ Isa. lxi. 6.

⁹ John xviii. 36.

Church pervading all nations with a spiritual presence, and finding its home in every tribe and family of mankind.

Again, Christianity fulfils the forecast of a suffering and glorified Messiah. . But instead of the temporal king of David's line, depicted by the letter of Hebrew prophecy, who should raise the nation to a glorious supremacy, and administer a righteous empire over the whole world from a visible throne in Jerusalem ; the New Testament sets before us a far nobler conception, in which the lineaments, remaining substantially true to the original, are spiritually transfigured and glorified. Here for the Christ of God we behold the Eternal Son, who "for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven,"¹ and "humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross;"² and who "when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high,"³ where "He ever liveth to make intercession for us,"⁴ and is "the Head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all."⁵

Once more, Christianity fulfils the forecast of a spiritual religion. Yet even here the idea

¹ Nicene Creed.

² Phil. ii. 8.

³ Heb. i. 3.

⁴ Heb. vii. 25.

⁵ Eph. i. 22, 23.

of the ancient prophets is signally heightened, and carried to an elevation of which they could have had no conception. Such a loosing of ceremonial fetters and prohibitions, such a lifting up of men into fellowship with God, such a filial freedom of the spirit, as enter into the New Testament conception of redemption in Christ, transcend the most soaring aspirations and glowing predictions of the greatest of the ancient seers, to whom visions of the future were granted. We find ourselves on a different level when even from their most rapturous anticipations we pass to the apostolic doctrine, and read of Christians being begotten of God to be His sons,⁶ raised up to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus,⁷ and built together into an holy temple for an habitation of God, through the Spirit,⁸ and are assured that "God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in Him."⁹

Thus in Christianity was truly fulfilled, and yet more than literally fulfilled, fulfilled with the highest spiritual emphasis and most glorious amplification, all that the Hebrew prophets had foreshadowed of the Messiah who should come, and of the setting up of His kingdom upon

⁶ 1 John v. 1.

⁸ Eph. ii. 21, 22.

⁷ Eph. ii. 6.

⁹ 1 John iv. 16.

earth. And what I contend for is this, that the relation thus established between the prophetic forecasts and the Christian realization is—so peculiar, so foreign to Jewish modes of thought, so real and at the same time so original and spiritual, and in harmony with our best conceptions of Divine truth, as to render it in a very high degree improbable that it could have sprung out of any conjunction of natural causes, or been fashioned by any hand but that of God Himself.

Will the sceptic say that the forecasts were nothing more than vague, indefinite aspirations or presentiments, such as might well have arisen in, and been breathed forth by, ardent patriotic souls, as they strove to guide their country to a purer faith and a brighter destiny? Not so, surely! Fragmentary as the forecasts were in their origin, and shaped in Jewish moulds of thought, they grew up during nearly a thousand years of gradual development into clear, unmistakeable outlines of a great future; and that future was one of which the general complexion and character was far from being in harmony with the narrow lines of Judaism.

Or, foiled in that endeavour to elude the pressure of the facts which point to a supernatural element in ancient prophecy, will

the sceptic now turn to the other element of the case, and urge that Christianity was just such a scheme as might have been evolved out of the supposed prophetic forecasts, by the brooding over them of speculative and enthusiastic minds, which discerned in their outlines a basis for the construction of an ideal religion ; and that this is the most credible explanation of the rise out of Judaism of a system of belief, which corresponded in the main with the hints of prophecy, and might easily be taken for a divinely-ordered realization or fulfilment of them? Again we must reply, Surely not! Christianity was far more than an artificial scheme, ingeniously fitted to pre-existing ideas, by minds of a speculative cast. It was a grand outburst of spiritual light and heat, pouring its creative energies into all the departments of human activity, and filling the ages with its rich and varied products. Besides, even if the broad facts of the case would allow us to wrench Christianity away from its historical basis and development, and sublime it into a mere speculative or theosophic system of thought, like religions that are purely subjective and theoretical, still this difficulty would remain insoluble, that it is very far indeed from being such a system of doctrine, as would naturally have suggested

itself to Jewish minds as the fulfilment of Hebrew prophecy. It was too spiritual, too comprehensive, too unearthly, too contradictory of the dearest desires and hopes of the contemporary Judaism, to permit us for a moment to conceive of it as hatched in Jewish brains, to simulate a fulfilment of the promises made of old to the fathers of Israel.

We are, then, at last shut up to this account of the case:—That out of Hebrew prophecy, which flowed like a mighty stream through many ages, ever gaining in volume and strength, there emerged at least three great and true forecasts of the future of religion and of God's dealing with the world, of such a kind as to indicate the presence and activity of some informing element which was not native to the national mind and genius; and that these forecasts prepared the way for, and were afterwards realized in, the wonderful rise and spread of Christianity, which in its world-wide catholicity, its lofty spirituality, and its doctrine of salvation through the passion and exaltation of its divine Founder, fulfilled all the expectations which the prophets had long before expressed, yet in a manner which transcended the mere letter of their predictions, and was more in accordance with the highest reality and

the most universal truth than any barely literal accomplishment could have been.

We have therefore this great phenomenon to account for and explain; the existence of a prolonged and complex line of true prophecy, bound up with the course of man's moral and spiritual growth, and issuing at last in a transcendently grand and glorious fulfilment, which has been the best heritage of all succeeding generations.

Whether this unique and vast phenomenon can be best explained by referring it to the unassisted action of the natural faculties of mankind, or by supposing the intervention of God's inspiring Spirit and supernatural guidance, the candid reader must decide for himself.

Only let me entreat him to bear in mind the momentous fact; that if the forecasts of Hebrew prophecy cannot be reasonably accounted for, except on the supposition that they were divinely inspired intimations of a divinely ordered future, then we are shut up to the conclusion that the alleged *facts* on which Christianity, as a religion, is based, are real and true; and that Jesus Christ is the only-begotten Son of God, who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was

made man, and was crucified, and on the third day rose again, and ascended into heaven, where He sits on the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from whence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

SECTION IX.

CORROBORATIONS AND ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE ARGUMENT.

IN the argument which has been pursued through the foregoing pages, the reader's attention has been strictly confined to the consideration of three great forecasts which are found pervading Hebrew prophecy, and of their signal realization and fulfilment in Christianity. Moreover, the evidence of the reality of these forecasts, that is, of their actual existence in the Old Testament Scriptures, has been drawn almost exclusively from the prophetic literature, without taking account of such corroborations and illustrations as might possibly have been furnished by various typical or suggestive incidents, personages, and institutions recorded in the sacred history.

This restriction of the ground covered by the argument may perhaps appear to have unduly narrowed the field of evidence, and excluded certain historical elements which would have helped to support the conclusion. But on the

whole I have thought the narrower and more definite course the best suited to our purpose. We are arguing against the position, that in the Old Testament there is no genuine prophetic element at all, and that everything found there is purely and entirely of human origin. The proof of the opposite view must rest mainly on the evidence already adduced. If that does not convince the gainsayer, nothing else will. If in those great outlines and chief streams of prophetic utterance, which have been displayed in the foregoing argument, he is unable to discern the presence of a true prophetic spirit, he certainly will not discover it in the more indistinct and shadowy allusions and hints conveyed by emblems and types. These weaker parts of the case derive their force from the stronger; and if mixed up with the main line of the reasoning, would be more likely to embarrass than assist it.

Nor will the sceptic, who holds his ground against the pressure of the three forecasts which have been urged against him, be more likely to yield to the cogency of a fourth, which is very commonly combined with them in the argument; that, namely, which had in view the dispersion of the Jewish people among all nations. It is true that in the treatises on Hebrew prophecy which preceded the applica-

tion to the Sacred Scriptures of the methods of scientific criticism, the predictions of this remarkable event were very generally relied upon, as furnishing one of the most convincing and unanswerable proofs of supernatural prescience in the prophets of Israel ; but there can be no doubt that the argument thus framed is less potent than it was, and that the effect of modern critical research has been, whether justly or not, materially to weaken its evidential force.

Should the reader be at a loss to understand why the same stress cannot still be safely laid on an argument of such apparent simplicity and directness, he may be reminded that it used to be based mainly on those two very striking chapters of the Pentateuch,¹ in which all the resources of the most impassioned language are employed to set forth the tremendous severity of the judgments which should overwhelm the nation, in the case of its rebellion and apostasy. On these remarkable chapters, although, strictly speaking, they are rhetorical and minatory rather than predictive, the argument securely rested, so long as the Mosaic authorship of them passed unchallenged. But the aspect of the question is greatly altered now that the sceptic can allege that these very chapters are among the foremost of the passages to which many

¹ Lev. xxvi. ; Deut. xxviii.

modern critics, on historical and philological grounds, have most confidently assigned a date posterior to the fall of the kingdom of Israel. For if this be their true date,—and to convince a sceptic to the contrary is certainly no easy task,—it follows that the idea of the ejection by foreign arms of the people of God from their own land to be scattered as exiles over the world, does not occur anywhere in the prophetic literature until after the deportation of Israel by the Assyrian power, when the still surviving, but feeble kingdom of Judah was in manifest peril of suffering a like fate at the hands of the threatening and aggressive empires, first of Assyria, and afterwards of Babylon. And if it was not till this late period that the prophets of Judah began to threaten their perverse and rebellious people with being carried away captive, and dispersed among the heathen, it is not without plausibility asserted by the sceptic that they needed no supernatural prescience to enable them to frame this forecast of the future, and that in predicting the dispersion they were only looking forward to a catastrophe which their natural sagacity saw to be probable, and making use of a warning to which the alarming political circumstances of their time gave extraordinary point and force. Whatever be the value of this explanation of

the case, it is obviously sufficient, so long as it has at its back a large amount of critical scholarship, to blunt the edge of the argument which used to rest on the predictions of the dispersion, and to deprive it of much of its polemical efficiency.

On this account I have abstained from including the forecast of the dispersion among these great forecasts of the future, on which I have endeavoured to build up the proof of a Divine inspiration resting upon the Hebrew prophets, and revealing through their utterances a true and genuine, though in some respects dim and indistinct, outline of the dispensation to come. Those who are already convinced, that the prophets were organs of Divine teaching to the chosen people, will probably not hesitate to connect their inspiration with this part of their message, as much as with any other part. But the case with the sceptic is different. He has all to learn, and he cannot be expected to make the least movement towards belief, except under the compulsion of evidence which defies his attempts to explain it away.

But although much that might seem, to one mind and another, to be pertinent and weighty, may have been excluded from the foregoing line of argument, it is not meant that none of those outlying portions of the subject, which

have been passed over, furnish anything of evidential value towards the support of the conclusion. Even if not suited to be a portion of the foundation, they may play the part of buttresses to the structure; they may corroborate and illustrate the position which has been established by direct evidence, and contribute to the confidence and the satisfaction with which the mind reposes in it.

For as soon as we have accepted, and incorporated among our settled convictions, the idea that the atmosphere of the Old Testament is instinct with prophecy in its widest and worthiest sense, and that the whole Jewish history and religious development exhibit a divinely ordered course of preparation for the Gospel; it becomes natural for us to be on the look out for prophetic allusions and foreshadowings in a thousand things, where we should never have dreamed of seeking them before. Reviewing, then, the ancient story of Israel, with its eventful vicissitudes and singular institutions, in this mood of expectation and spiritual sensibility; when we perceive how it becomes luminous in the light of that idea, and many of its varied features lend themselves, by mystic correspondences and typical pre-figurations to foreshadow or illustrate the Christian mysteries, our grasp on the idea which pro-

duces these effects becomes firmer, and the conception of a Divine purpose and spiritual unity running through the two covenants, and linking them organically together, roots itself more deeply, and spreads itself more widely, in our minds.

Here it is especially requisite to bear in mind that prophecy, in its most comprehensive and spiritual sense, is very far from being adequately represented by prediction. A whole dispensation might be stamped with a prophetic character, and be alive with genuine forecasts of the future purposes of God, without containing a single definite prediction within its whole compass.

Christianity exhibits a system of doctrines or truths which cluster round and centre in the adorable Person of the Son of God, the Divine word, incarnate and manifested as a Man among men. He is presented to our faith as anointed by the Spirit for His mediatorial office, offering Himself as a spotless Sacrifice to God for our sins, bruising by His cross the powers of evil, justifying us by His resurrection from the dead, lifting us into abiding fellowship with God by His ascension, interceding for us as a royal Advocate, governing us as our almighty and infinitely gracious Lord and Head. Such a system of truth as this is obviously not to be taken in at once, by minds which have not enjoyed any preparatory training to understand

it, and have hitherto moved exclusively in an outer region of worldly thoughts and cares.

Now Christianity being such a system, and needing to have its way prepared in the hearts of mankind, suppose that, on looking back to the course of events which preceded its promulgation, we found the previous thousand years and more to have been occupied by another system of religious thought and worship, standing to it in a certain relation of preparatory discipline and instruction. Suppose that this more ancient religion, while being of a lower order in the spirituality of its conceptions, and the purity of its ethics, yet manifestly embodied the germs of Christian ideas, contained rude sketches and outlines suggestive of the more perfect revelation to come, and on the whole laid a foundation on which the future fabric might be fitly built. In such a case the earlier system might justly be regarded as prefigurative, and instinct with the spirit of prophecy. Even if we failed to discover in it a single explicit promise or prediction, which we could independently recognize as pointing to a future and more advanced system, it would none the less be a truly prophetic character, by reason of its foreordained relation to the dispensation to which it served as an introduction. And when the future had come, and Christianity had

been inaugurated and had grown up to maturity, and the evolution of events had made it evident that the older system had all the time been really working towards this higher manifestation of God, and familiarizing men's minds with conceptions in which Christian doctrines could root themselves ; then a flood of light would be poured back on the nature of the Past, and the earlier dispensation would be recognized by the spiritual understanding as a genuine foreshadowing of, and preparation for, the higher and more perfect religion.

That Judaism was really thus related to Christianity has been the almost universal belief of Christians. No more competent judge of both could be found than St. Paul, and he views them in this light when he says, "Before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith that should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our school-master to bring us unto Christ ;"² and again when he calls the Jewish institutions "a shadow of things to come."³ On the same view the whole argument of the Epistle to the Hebrews is based. To a like conclusion the inquiry of the preceding pages distinctly leads up. If our induction of a supernatural element pervading Hebrew prophecy be valid, Judaism in

general, with its literature, its institutions, its laws, its personages and incidents, can hardly be deemed less than a grand historical preparation ordained by God, and extending through many ages, to make ready the world for the manifestation of His gracious purposes in Christ. Hence, wherever we find in it things which wonderfully fit in with, and lend themselves to shadow forth and suggest, the facts and truths of Christianity, we are justified in recognizing in these, not indeed a literally predictive element, but one which is impregnated with a prophetic character and meaning. Apart from the ascertained presence of God's will and purpose in the unfolding of Judaism, such interpretations would of course be liable to serious question, and on that account they have little solid argumentative value in the debate with the unbeliever. But to the believer they open out interesting fields of inquiry, and bring important confirmations of his faith; and as he thus traces the Divine dealings with the fathers of Israel, he is led to exclaim with St. Paul, "O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!"⁴

How rich Christian theology is in such uses of the Old Testament it is almost superfluous to point out. In the mystic Seed promised to the

⁴ Rom. xi. 33.

woman in paradise ; in the ark sheltering the righteous family from the destruction poured out on the ungodly world ; in Abraham's promised seed, the destined channel of blessing to the nations ; in Isaac mysteriously laid on the wood for sacrifice ; in Melchisedek, king of Peace, priest of the most High God ; in the Aaronic priesthood ordained to stand as mediators between Jehovah and His people ; in the entire sacrificial system, with its expiations and cleansings, its passover, its daily offerings and solemn yearly atonement ; in the mystic arrangements of the sanctuary, with its ark and mercy-seat and veil ; in the brazen serpent lifted up that the stricken people might be healed ; in the manna that fell from heaven to feed them in the wilderness, and the rock that was smitten to yield them living waters for their thirst ; in the order of prophets raised up to reveal the Divine will ; in heaven-sent deliverers who rolled back the tide of oppression, and anointed kings who ruled the people in righteousness :—in these and many other features of the Hebrew annals and institutions Evangelists and Apostles, and Christian divines, and devout believers have delighted to trace dim foreshadowings of Him that should come, the Christ of God, and faint outlines of His office and work. And although to persons who

resolve both Judaism and Christianity into merely natural or organic outgrowths of the human mind, such uses of the Old Testament Scriptures will be sure to appear fanciful and frivolous; to the spiritual mind, already convinced of a divine agency in the development of the two great religions to which the world's advance in the knowledge of God is exclusively due, this method of tracing correspondences between the earlier and later parts of the sequence will sufficiently approve itself, as resting on the unity of God's design, and the historical order of His revelation of Himself to the children of men.

In concluding my task, I commend the foregoing argument to the reader's candid and serious consideration, entreating him to remember what was pointed out at the beginning, that the argument from prophecy is by no means the main support on which Christianity rests, but is subsidiary to the proof furnished by Christianity itself. The doctrine of Christ Himself is the holy of holies of the temple of Divine truth; while prophecy may be considered as one of the portals by which the devout inquirer is admitted, to behold the beauty and glory of the Lord in the midst of His chosen sanctuary.



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